Université de Sherbrooke
Faculté de théologie et d'études religieuses

# THE METAPHORICAL THEOLOGY OF SALLIE McFAGUE:
## an exploratory study

Q. Hugh J. Gwyn

Mémoire de maîtrise
Programme d'études du religieux contemporain

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*
*ISBN: 978-0-494-88913-8*

*Our file Notre référence*
*ISBN: 978-0-494-88913-8*

## ABSTRACT

Sallie McFague, an American theologian, has developed a metaphorical theology during the last 35 years. Her fundamental critique is that the language and dominant metaphors that are used in theology to talk of God in relation to the world are no longer meaningful or significant today. Her basic methodology is to use scripture, tradition, feminist insights, process thought and experience as the basis for advancing her theology. Her premises arose primarily from her perception of the oppression of women, men and the rest of living and non-living creation arising from dominant hierarchal dualisms. Creation has been commodified in the neo-classical economic model. She proposes the alternative metaphors of mother, lover and friend to describe our relation with God and a model of Creation as God's Body to underpin our understanding of our relationship to creation. This is essentially congruent with the present evolutionary cosmological model of the universe. It means that we are both utterly dependent on the world, living and inanimate, and that we can no longer look upon it as other; because as God's body, God is both transcendent and radically immanent in creation, our present home where we must be actors in it as well and not tourists – temporary residents.

**SOMMAIRE**

Le but de ce mémoire est d'explorer la théologie de Sallie McFague. Théologienne américaine de tendance épiscopalienne, elle a travaillé pendant 35 ans à Vanderbilt University au Tennessee. Elle est présentement Distinguished Visiting Professor of Theology à la University of British Columbia.

Depuis les années 60, elle étudie le problème créé par les dualismes hiérarchiques qui nous ont amenés, à travers notre mode de vie, de multiples oppressions : celle des humains, celle de la vie non humaine ainsi que celle de notre monde, c'est-à-dire la création terrestre. Elle constate que notre mode de vie, dopé par le modèle néo-classique économique nous a conduit dans cette situation. Ce que nous faisons, repose sur ce que nous disons, fruit de ce que nous pensons, c'est-à-dire fruit de nos valeurs fonctionnelles. Notre langage, essentiellement métaphorique, ainsi que les dualismes implicites et explicites vécus mettent donc dans une situation de crises et d'oppression la communauté humaine et la communauté naturelle.

L'objectif principal de ce mémoire est de présenter la théologie de McFague en en décrivant sa méthodologie. Notre hypothèse est que sa théologie est une théologie métaphorique qui a été par la suite développée davantage dans des contextes spécifiques pour répondre à des urgences et des crises multiples de notre temps. En effet, le développement de sa théologie métaphorique dans le contexte de son analyse de l'écologie évolutionnaire est intimement lié à une dimension de la cosmologie évolutionnaire moderne. Ultimement, le discours écologique de McFague devient une contextualisation essentielle à sa théologie métaphorique.

Dans ses premiers livres, McFague insiste sur l'importance des métaphores dans nos vies et par extension sur le rôle des paraboles de Jésus pour annoncer le Royaume de Dieu. Ce dernier est fondamentalement un royaume de libération dans tous les sens possibles : libération de toutes créatures, de tous les humains, de tous vivants et de tout non vivants.

Pour corriger les implications évidentes des métaphores dominantes de Dieu en relation avec le monde, elle en propose des nouvelles : Dieu mère, Dieu amoureux et Dieu ami. Dans son analyse, elle souligne comment ces métaphores nous approchent de Dieu, Dieu qui est autrement éloigné (transcendent), et peu 'accessible' (immanent). Elle fait un pas de plus en proposant que Dieu ne soit pas uniquement accessible à travers quelques sacrements mais constamment présent puisque la création est le corps de Dieu. Dieu n'est pas absent de sa création. Dieu est dans la création, la création est un sacrement ; elle propose une panenthéisme.

Une des conséquences majeures de cette proposition est sa clarification apportée à la notion de péché. En effet nous péchons rarement contre Dieu, Dieu-même. Nous avons plutôt l'habitude de pécher presque uniquement contre la Création de Dieu; contre nos voisins, contre les inconnus et davantage contre la terre. Nous péchons surtout par notre mode de vie qui est dirigée par notre égocentrisme (self-interest).

Pour contextualiser sa théologie, McFague analyse les conséquences de notre mode de vie en fonction des menaces de l'holocauste nucléaire et de notre éloignement progressif de la nature ; nous sommes devenus des touristes, des voyeurs de la nature. Là où nous étions des acteurs dans la nature avant la modernité, nous avons réussi à l'instrumentaliser, aussi bien la nature que nos consoeurs, nos confrères, et nous mêmes. Ceci est au point où, selon les pronostiques scientifiques, nous pourrions approcher d'un « tipping point », point où notre climat global changerait de manière irréversible.

On fait habituellement quatre grandes critiques à la théologie de McFague. D'abord au plan littéraire, elle prétend qu'une parabole est une métaphore étendue, ce qu'elle n'a jamais démontré formellement. Ce concept de longue tradition apparaît comme vrai. L'importance accordée à l'identité métaphore-parabole permet d'affirmer que l'une et l'autre ont les mêmes caractéristiques. La parabole ne pourrait jamais être interprétée comme une allégorie ; une parabole doit être vu comme métaphore. Une des caractéristiques typiques est de dire d'une métaphore, par exemple Dieu père, « It is and it isn't. »

Une deuxième critique s'arrête au fait qu'elle aurait développé une théologie éco-féministe : les traditionalistes le déplorent et les féministes trouvent qu'elle ne va pas assez loin. On peut l'analyser en deux temps. McFague se déclare féministe réformiste; elle utilise les résultats des critiques apportés par des féministes quant à la femme ainsi qu'à l'homme, la vie non humaine et la nature non vivante. Cependant, elle ne se limite pas à une méthodologie féministe puisqu'elle utilise également les fruits du « process thought », les Écritures, la tradition ainsi que l'expérience des femmes et des hommes. Et la synthèse de ceux-ci est employée comme norme d'évaluation, ce qui ne la qualifie pas comme théologienne féministe. Quant à sa préoccupation écologique, elle se proposait une théologie de la nature ceci dans le but de placer sa théologie dans des contextes concrèts (potentiel holocauste nucléaire et changements climatiques permanents). L'état de notre monde sur tous les plans est une préoccupation mondiale.

Sa théologie ne porte pas une formulation traditionnelle. Dès le début elle l'a appelée une théologie intermédiaire, entre un discours crédible pour aujourd'hui et une théologie systématique. Mais cela ne signifie pas qu'il n'y ait aucune corrélation à faire; ce n'est simplement pas encore réalisé. Les critiques sévères, quant à l'absence de liens avec la tradition dans sa théologie, soulignent très bien que les modèles dominants dits traditionnels, laissent beaucoup à désirer parce que basés sur des métaphores qu'on ne comprend plus et qui sont largement impertinents dans les contextes actuels.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by thanking Marc Dumas very warmly who introduced me to Sallie McFague. Having accumulated several of her books over the years, he found me a willing candidate to read further. His insight, gentle criticisms, and constant good humour have made this study both possible and a delight.

I have benefited singularly from the openness of all my fellow students in different discussions and seminars during the last three years. We have all been able to take advantage of the unique environment to explore, in a respectful community, contemporary religion in various milieus. This was possible because of the philosophy and vision of the Faculté de théologie et études religieuses of the Université de Sherbrooke.

I thank Susan Mactaggart, my wife, for her invaluable editing of the manuscript and her patience during the last three years. Finally, I thank M Guy Perrault for his friendship and gentle wisdom which he shared while I prepared this thesis.

# THE METAPHORICAL THEOLOGY OF SALLIE McFAGUE:

## An exploratory study

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

# Chapter 1

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sallie McFague has developed a metaphorical theology over the past 35 years. She developed it in response to the frustrating consequences of the language that was dominant in Christian churches and is still so to some extent. These are the dualisms and hierarchies in religious discourse which have for effect to set men and women, head and heart, body and soul against one another, giving dominance to one over the other. Her essential thesis is that how we speak is how we think, and how we think is how we act. And further, how we speak of ourselves, our world, and our God can only be in metaphors; there is no single unique way. And finally, the theology that we do must be rooted in the present context.

The fundamental critique by McFague is that the language and dominant metaphors that are used to describe God, or rather to talk of God in relation to the world are no longer meaningful or significant to us today. She does not reject this language or the metaphors, they were probably appropriate in their time, but she does not hesitate to criticise them, pointing out their weaknesses and in some cases, their perverse consequences in our time. Furthermore the fact that certain words used in reference to God have been absolutised has rendered them virtually idolatrous.

This project then is an exploration of the metaphorical theology of Sallie McFague in order to understand her methodology, her theology - its inherent trajectory - and perhaps to appreciate the links of her theological project to tradition.

## 1.1 WHO IS SALLIE MCFAGUE

Sallie McFague is a Protestant theologian who has followed the unique path of restricting herself to the development of her theology. She has forborne the custom of many theologians to venture into a wide range of areas of theological inquiry. Her career has focused nearly exclusively on the development of an "intermediate" theology which she has named metaphorical theology.

### 1.1.1 A brief curriculum vitae

Born: May 25 1933 in Quincy, Massachusetts.

Education: B.A. in English Literature, Smith College, 1955
B.D. Yale Divinity School, 1959
M.A. Yale 1960
Ph.D. Yale 1964
Litt.D. Smith College in 1977

She married Eugene TeSelle in 1959 and has 2 children.

She spent essentially all her professional life at the Vanderbilt Divinity School (Vanderbilt University, Tennesse - 1975-2000) with sessions as Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge University; Visiting Professor at Harvard Divinity School, and Vancouver School of Theology where since 2000 she is now Distinguished Theologian in Residence.

McFague has been labelled an eco-feminist theologian as the following quotation from Wikipedia suggests, one of many similar ones:

> Sallie McFague is an American feminist Christian theologian, best known for her analysis of how metaphor lies at the heart of how we may speak about God. She has applied this approach in particular to ecological issues, writing extensively on care for the earth as if it were God's 'body'.[1]

---

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sallie_McFague, accessed 2009.08

This is unfortunate because by using such a label she is in some manner being marginalised. As Bouma noted:

> Niches, however, have a way of becoming pigeonholes, and the ease with which women in theology are identified as feminist theologians threatens to ignore the considerable contributions which many have made to theological discussions in other areas. [2]

## 1.2 SIGNS OF HER TIMES

It is appropriate at this point in this essay, to provide some indication of the theological concerns during the period when this theology was being written and provide a glimpse of the period when the work began. McFague published her first book in 1966,[3] in a decade of cultural and social turmoil, marked by profound religious interruptions. Perhaps the most significant interruption is that God was said to be dead,[4] news had slowly filtered through to the western world. Only in the mid 1960s was it broadly known with the translation of Nietzsche's works. This is an important symbol, because God's "demise" represents the final ascendency of science and technology and therefore the supremacy of rationality. This has had far reaching implications in the development of modernity and the general secularisation of western societies. It has had particularly severe impacts on the major religions particularly in the Western world.

However, at the same time as the "mainline" churches begin to recede and of a sort of hedonism spread, there was a whole range of countervailing movements that included the *aggiornamiento* within the Catholic Church, the adoption of new spiritualities from the East[5] and the development of theopoetics[6], a whole new form in poetry which is in conscious resistance to the dehumanizing imperatives of positivism and technology[7].

---

[2] Bouma, Rolf, 1997, *Feminist Theology: Rosemary Radford Ruether/Sallie McFague.* The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology.
[3] TeSelle, Sallie M., 1966, *Literature and the christian life.* Yale University Press, 238p.
[4] Nietzsche, Frederick, 1883, *Also sprach Zarathustra / Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York, Viking Press, 1966.
[5] Needleman, Jacob, 1984, *The new religions,* Crossroad, 243p.
[6] Miller, David L., 2010 *Theopoetry or theopoetics?,* Cross Currents, p 6-23.
[7] Wilder, Amos Niven, 1976, *Theopoetic: theology and the religious imagination.* Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 106p.

This latter movement, which is still thriving, is a striking parallel to the development of romanticism in the 19th century that arose in disgust against the Industrial Revolution. This apparently contradictory mixture of tendencies as it pertains to the Catholic Church has been succinctly described by Gregory Baum.[8]

These are but a few of the many developments which sprang up in the face of what was intuitively understood; the emptying or eclipse of the human soul. It would almost seem that the "Golden Thread" still firmly attached to the hooks in our being was being tweaked once again.

The process of secularisation, its contradictions and the countervailing tendencies is aptly described by Giani Vattimo[9] as having in part

> [...]less to do with the overturning of a sacred order that is no longer accepted, or with leaving such an order behind as an error that has now been recognized and eliminated, and more to do with a relation of repetition-maintenance-distortion – a relation that is precisely typical of the links between modern profane society and its Hebraic-Christian roots.

Stanley Hopper one of the founders of theopoetics speaks in a more specific way about the rootlessness of the time:

> When we are moving from countermyth to some new positive myth structure, in between one way of seeing and another way of seeing, there occurs the temptation to the pseudo-myth, the profane myth. [...] To go beyond this is very difficult. [Wallace] Stevens[10] is attempting that -- trying to find a fresh way to lay hold on ultimate meaning in such a way that it will be confirmed by deep experience and restore the lost vitality of meaningfulness, to oneself and the world about us. If we lose a world picture, a dualistic way of seeing, with God above and ourselves below, that way of seeing is gone. With the old transcendence gone, we tend to be thrown back on ourselves where we discover a depth within ourselves, and we find that it curiously sustains us, once we have found that relationship. So we tend to move from a transcendent world picture to a picture of what I have called *radical immanence*.[11]

---

[8] Baum, Gregory, 2010, *The church's tomorrow*, The Ecumenist, V. 47 p 6-10
[9] Vattimo, Gianni, 1989, *The transparent society*. Wiley, 129p. 87-88
[10] Stevens was a major American Modernist poet http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallace_Stevens accessed 2011.02
[11] David Miller: Stanley Hopper and mythopoetics, http://www.sarcc.org/Hopper.htm accessed 2010.09

All of the themes that are mentioned in this coherent sequence – myth, ultimate meaning, deep experience, meaningfulness, world picture, dualistic way of seeing, transcendence, radical immanence – are all directly or indirectly linked to the "death of God" as the sign of the times, and to the specific interests of Sallie McFague as discussed in this essay.

## 1.3 HYPOTHESIS

Based on the foregoing, the hypothesis of this research is that the work of Sallie McFague is essentially the development of a metaphorical theology and that this has been subsequently contextualized in response to the threat of nuclear armaments and to the appalling state of Earth's environment.

## 1.4 PROBLEMATIC

McFague's theology has its primary origins in an analytical regard of literature and its explicit or implicit religious content. She first establishes a pervading dualism between man and the world: "There is it seems, in the heart of every Christian, a consciousness, however dim, that his faith involves a renunciation of the world or at least a detachment from it[...] ".[12] This is an abiding theme which she struggles with in her theology. Thus, she reflects on the dominant vocabulary that is used to describe the God-world relation.[13] She sets herself the task of providing new ways to do this which will be both comprehensible (meaning-full) and relevant. It would almost seem that she is responding to the masterful criticism by Herschel:

> It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but

---

[12] *Literature and the christian life* 1

[13] McFague, Sallie, 1975, *Speaking in parables: a study in metaphor and theology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 186p.

> because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless. [14]

One could suggest that he was as well aware of the signs of the time as McFague. Herschel goes on to set the challenge for theologians.

> Religion is an answer to ultimate questions. The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in. The primary task of religious thinking is to rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer, to develop a degree of sensitivity to the ultimate questions which its ideas and acts are trying to answer.
>
> Religious thinking is an intellectual endeavor out of the depths of reason. It is a source of cognitive insight into the ultimate issues of human existence. Religion is more than a mood or a feeling. Judaism, for example, is a way of thinking, not only a way of living. Unless we understand its categories, its mode of apprehension and evaluation, its teachings remain unintelligible.
>
> It is not enough to call for good will. We are in desperate need of good thinking. [15]

McFague's work sets a course to discover new ways to talk about, or better expressed, to image God as transcendent and immanent.[16] She examines the dominant vocabulary that is used now and has been for centuries, and how it has become largely without significance in the present time, and in what ways it has ensured that God would remain distant if not "dead". The lexicon that is still used was developed in particular times and to respond to particular needs. McFague's argument is that it is, for the most part, no longer comprehensible in our time.

---

[14] Herschel, Abraham J., 1959, *Between God and man: an interpretation of Judaism.* Simon & Schuster, 298p. 1

[15] Between God and man 1

[16] McFague, Sallie, 1982, *Metaphorical theology: models of God in religious language.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 225p.

McFague, Sallie, 1987, *Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 224p.

The dominant lexicon has provided an image of God who is permanently distant (father, king, lord, master) with attributes of utter power (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence). McFague quotes Gilkey by way of a summary of her problematic:

> [...]the word or symbol "God" has generally referred to one, supreme, or holy being, the unity of ultimate reality and ultimate goodness. So conceived, God is believed to have created the entire universe, to rule over it, and to intend to bring it to its fulfillment or realization, to "save" it.[17]

McFague argues that these images served well in their time, but that they are no longer accessible to us in our time. Further she analyses the detrimental impact that this lexicon has led to: hierarchy, dualism, dominion over, among others. It is in part because of these pervasive, prevalent, negative impacts that McFague argues for a new theology in the evolutionary ecological and nuclear age which is ours.

Her challenge is somewhat intimidating: "The purpose of theology is to make it possible for the gospel to be heard in our time."[18] This is the formidable task which she sets for herself in a marvellous parallelism with Herschel. It is in the development of her theology that she must address the domination of women and the dominion over our planet and the marginalisation of so many. The result is a theology which proposes images of God which are utterly inclusive of the whole of creation, including the banishment of anthropocentrism, one in which God is both transcendent and eminently immanent.

She has published seven books analysing and revisoning religious language[19]. The first lays the groundwork with the claim that since all religious language is metaphorical,

---

[17] Gilkey, Langdon, 1985, *God in Christian theology: an introduction to its traditions and tasks.* rev. ed., Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King eds., Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 400p. 89-90 quoted in *Models of God* 18

[18] *Speaking in parables: a study in metaphor and theology* 1

[19] *Speaking in parables: a study in metaphor and theology*
*Metaphorical theology: models of God in religious language*
*Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age*
McFague, Sallie, 1993, *The body of God: an ecological theology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 288p.
McFague, Sallie, 1997, *Super, natural Christians: how we should love nature.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 224p.
McFague, Sallie, 2001, *Life abundant: rethinking theology and economy for a planet in peril (searching for a new framework).* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 274p.

alternatives to traditional metaphors are possible. The second experiments with several alternative models: God as mother, lover, and friend and the world as God's body. The third attempts a more systematic theology through the lens of one of these models, creation as God's body. The fourth book suggests that a Christian nature spirituality should be based on a subject-subjects model of being, knowing, and doing instead of the subject-object model of Western culture. [20] The last three books greatly expand her ideas with concern for the state of our planet's environment, its causes and her analysis and theological response. It is in that sense that they appear as extensive contextualisations and further developments of her metaphorical theology.

Because the present study is exploratory many questions have arisen answers including the following:

- What is Sallie McFague's theology?
- What is her methodology?
- Where is McFague's theology leading, that is to say what might be its inherent trajectory?
- Where is she taking us with respect to "orthodoxy"? Is her theology linked to tradition? And if not, can it be liked to tradition?

## 1.5 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this thesis is to present the metaphorical theology of McFague and in so doing to describe her methodology. As a consequence I will demonstrate that her metaphorical theology and its development within her analysis of evolutionary ecology are intimately related and that ultimately McFague's ecological discourse is a necessary contextualisation of her metaphorical theology.

---

McFague, Sallie, 2008, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 204p.

[20] *The body of God* 2

## 1.6 LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

The present research is limited to a presentation of the theology developed by McFague: its premises, its methodology, its structure and its development over 35 years. This is a substantial undertaking in itself. It will also be limited in the evaluation of her theology in reference to other work with similar contextual application. A limited discussion will be presented of evaluations of her theology; this is because McFague's work has not received extensive critical review and these have been primarily focused on certain foundational aspects rather than on the fundamental insights which she offers.

The explicit and implicit criticisms of the dominant theology in Christianity presented by McFague resonate very strongly as do the metaphors and models which she proposes. As a result a central question arises, which is how and in what specific ways is her theology contiguous with Christian tradition. Every theology has been developed in its specific age. McFague's theology was developed for our age with no pretension on her part as to its longevity. Nevertheless it is vital that the links with tradition be made explicit. And while McFague is preoccupied with developing and refining her work in this sense (e.g. McFague 1993), it is a major question in its own right and will only be touched on briefly.

## 1.7 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study is quite direct. Having identified above the series of questions of most interest, I have used all of McFague's books and many of her essays and articles and extracted from them all the pertinent elements which allowed adequate though not exhaustive answers to those questions. Secondary references have provided perspective on her work from different areas of interest: linguistics, feminism,

orthodoxy, Christology and environmentalism among several. These will be referred to primarily during the discussion of her theology.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2) I examine the premises of the theology and in so doing give brief introductions to it by way of providing some context. In the following two chapters (Chapter 3 & 4) I present the theology which can be placed in two parts. The **first** is the elaboration of her metaphorical theology and the **second** is the contextualization of it with respect to the nuclear threats of the 1970s and 1980s and more recently to the condition of the environment of our planet. Chapter 5 is a discussion based on internal elements in McFague's work and on secondary analyses and commentaries. Chapter 6 is a presentation of the conclusions arrived at throughout the thesis.

# Chapter 2

## CHAPTER 2: PREMISES IN THE THEOLOGY OF SALLY MCFAGUE

This chapter is an analysis of McFague's treatment of the theological, social and scientific starting points from which she developed her theology. It addresses first her development of a metaphorical theology and secondly her contextualization of it within an evolutionary ecological model and her theological reflection on global climate change.

The term premise refers to the starting points in McFague's writings. It is a given or set of givens; some idea, concept or position that is "outside" of the matter of a given essay. In the context of this research, they are presentations and exposés of social, religious and natural conditions or contexts of greater or lesser magnitude which are described and analysed to a greater or lesser degree. They are not specifically defended because the author considers them to be more or less self-evident. Sometimes the premises are quite explicit, at other times they are imbedded in the introduction to her essays. Some arise out of an analysis or sketch (image?) of a heartfelt social or religious situation or condition. They sometimes arise out of anger.

McFague has used two techniques in stating her premises. The first is the most direct as for example: that "a parable is an extended metaphor". This relationship is described but not defended, it is a given. For this she has been criticised either because it is intellectually unsatisfying or because it leaves her subsequent arguments open to doubtful criticism.

The second type of premise that McFague uses is a set of givens, which are arrived at as the result of an iterative process. In the following quotation we have the end results, a set of givens, of a lengthy presentation of the purpose and implications of models in science. These insights become, in effect, the premise of her investigation of models in theology.

> Several points should now be clear. First, models provide intelligibility for the unintelligible; they simplify and offer suggestive, concrete detail for expansion and exploitation. Second, models are not pictures of entities, but networks or structures of relationships, focused on behaviour. Whether we take the example of a chess game for war, or waves and particles for the atom, or father for God, in each case we are dealing with a set of relationships that serve as an explanation of the way an unfamiliar phenomenon works in terms of the structure of a more familiar area. Third, models, in conjunction with

> theories, provide an ever widening panorama of explanation, allowing phenomena within a field and at times across fields to be linked in connecting networks. Hence, systems are constructed that provide intelligibility, not just to this or that phenomenon, but to reality as a whole. Fourth, models are paradigm-dependent, "created" as well as "discovered" by persons working within a set of assumptions that delimits the possibility of the innocent eye. Thus, they are always partial, even when deemed appropriate, necessitating both alternative and complementary models as well as eternal vigilance against their literalization, *against the loss of the metaphorical tension.*[21]

She has built up a complex of models and theories which provide us with a range of possibilities to be applied in her essays. Indeed, scientific model types are used in the development of much of her theology. Implicit in this process is the declared need for new models within theology and respect for models in science.

## 2.1 WHERE DOES HER THEOLOGY SPRING FROM?

There are two main points of departure in her theology. The first is based on a sociological-anthropological critique of the way humans live on planet Earth, and the second is based on science: its modeling techniques, its cosmological models, and its insights into the workings of our planetary environment.

Her earliest published writing was based on her Ph.D. thesis *Literature and the Christian Life*[22]. She wrote "I would stress again that the main issue between Christians and artists, Christianity and the arts, is the legitimate one of the protection of the uniqueness of their individual truth claims."; she was laying out in this sentence, perhaps unwittingly, her basic theological premise. This symbolises her persistent awareness of God and man-creation.[23] She is in effect laying the corner stone of her life's work which has been the

---

[21] *Metaphorical theology* 102

[22] *Literature and the christian life* 3

[23] An amusing example of this is her chiding remark: "Christian sacramentalism has usually been utilitarian in intent, that is, using the things of the world as symbols of religious states. They are often not appreciated in their own integrity as having intrinsic value but rather as stepping stones on one's pilgrimage to God." *The body of God* 183.

elucidation of the relation between theo-logos and of creation; God is revealed through creation and creation cannot be resumed in any single truth claim.

In her early studies she was greatly influenced by Barth and Tillich particularly, because as she wrote, "[...]of Barth's heady divine transcendence and "otherness" to be as invigorating as cold mountain air[...]" . But she was gradually weaned from them and it was one of her teachers and mentor, Richard Niebuhr, who provided her with an "understanding of the task of theology as serving the hearing of the word of God in a particular time and place. The purpose of theology is to make it possible for the gospel to be heard in our time."[24] To this she added her reflection about being a woman theologian: "Formation counts, of course, and [...] that while my femininity qualifies my theology it does so adjectivally and indirectly. My femininity was not then and is not now the determining factor in my theological pilgrimage and the projects emerging from it."[25] Her turning point however came when reading an essay by Gordon Kaufman in 1983, in which he called for the deconstruction and reconstruction of the basic symbols of the Jewish and Christian traditions.[26]

She wrote in 1991: "[...]Niebuhr's deep appreciation of Schleiermacher and of liberalism's concern for experience, relativity, the symbolic imagination and the role of the affections set the questions that many of us were to continue to wrestle with in our own subsequent theological careers." What is important here is that McFague is 'gathering together' elements, themes, understandings which bring her down to Earth as it were, rather than remaining among ideas alone. They are the origins, premises of her theology and in the end will lead her to the areas where she develops the contexts of her theology.

---

[24] *Speaking in parables*
[25] *Speaking in parables* 2
[26] *The body of God* 86

## 2.2 ORIGINS OF HER METAPHORIC THEOLOGY

McFague's metaphorical theology is presented in her first major publications.[27] They reveal the heritage of her work on literary criticism and Christianity. It moves from her insistence on maintaining the integrity of human expression and the interpretation of literature to the integrity of parables, extended metaphors, that must be seen as a "story" that defies interpretation but that in fact interprets the reader. She wrote: "It has been the contention of this essay that the root-metaphor of Christianity is not God the father but the kingdom or rule of God, a relationship between the divine and the human that no model can encompass."[28]

This underscores her almost angry critique of the dominant metaphors, including God the Father, King. All powerful, and the accompanying dualisms of man-woman, human-nonhuman, mind-body, which are bases of the associated hierarchies including man-over-woman, mankind-over-nature and mind-over-body. The result of these hierarchies has been injustice: to women, to the weak, to nature, in sum to creation, which she elaborated in various ways in these first publications. Her starting point, then, can be seen as a protest against the "imperialist, triumphalist metaphors for God" that she sees as endemic to pre-modern and modern Christianity.[29]

Her introduction of the centrality of parables arises from her earlier interests in literature but also her desire to work in the area of what McFague calls an intermediary theology. Such a theology takes its source in the parables of the New Testament but is also "coherent, consistent and precise" which is characteristic of systematic theology. As she suggests: "[...]the New Testament parable, understood as an extended metaphor, is an appropriate model for theological reflection, because it holds in solution the ordinary and the extraordinary and unites language, belief, and life into a whole."[30]

Her premise here is that theology could fulfill its function better were it to attend to the parables as models of theological reflection. Her critique is that if theology becomes

---

[27] McFague 1975, 1982, 1987
[28] *Metaphorical theology* 146
[29] Livingstone et al. 2006, 428
[30] *Speaking in parables* 63

overly abstract and conceptual, it separates thought and life, belief and practice, words and their embodiment.

The transition can also be expressed as the movement from the language we use and the metaphors that we use, which together inevitably underpin what it is that we do and the way we live. This idea is repeated in various ways in all her essays but most forcefully when she wrote: "The three levels we have been concerned with - language, belief, and lifestyle - are integrated in this third level, for language and belief are here hammered out in a life; the integrity of the new insights one has come to through language and belief are now painfully tested in one's life."REF[31] Here again she insists on integrity which can be understood both as "rightness" or "right action" but also that the integrity of an individual's insights is to be respected and which are not to be subsumed by any other "faith claim".

## 2.3 ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF GOD

McFague declared that "the root-metaphor of Christianity is not God the father but the kingdom or rule of God." This is of vital importance as her guiding premise in the remainder of her work. Thus, having established the basis of her metaphorical theology, McFague continues its development by proposing that the dominant metaphors of Father, King and distant Creator can be replaced by ones which are more accessible in our time. In *Models of God* she calls for a new sensibility for our time which she describes as an ecological, nuclear age: a sensibility that is holistic and responsible, that is inclusive of all life forms, and that acknowledges the interdependence of all life.[32] The holistic paradigm is meant to replace the atomistic paradigm which has been dominant since the 18th century. That we become inclusive of all life arises, for the first time, from the realisation of what humans are capable of with nuclear arms. The terrible consequence of their use is that the silencing all life would silence the consciousness of creation.

---

[31] *Speaking in Parables* 146
[32] *Models of God* 3

She developed the model of God our Mother, Lover and Friend in her book *Models of God*, in which her starting point is that we must replace our dominant anthropocentric model/thinking with one centered on the whole of God's creation. Her premise here is that science and specifically postmodern science can help in deconstructing the myths that have been prevalent for several thousand years (e.g. Genesis) and reconstructing creation, and thus open new horizons to remythologise by way of reconstructing our discourse concerning the relation between God, humankind, and creation.[33] Modern science brought us to a reductionist and mechanistic view of the physical world. However, in postmodern science these models of the physical reality have been replaced by dynamic, evolutionary models. As McFague writes, models in science "are credible candidates for today from both a Christian and postmodern perspective."[34] Essentially our reconstructed sensibility will replace the subject-object vision of reality based on modern scientific models, with a subject-subjects sensibility, that is more akin to postmodern cosmology.

She applies the modeling approach as a means of testing the rightness of her theological understanding of the relation between God and the world. These models are central in their own right as means of imaging, seeing anew our relationship to creation and to God. When seen together, they are also a way of imagining the Trinity – God of love: the Love of God as Mother-Agape, the Love of God as Lover-Eros, and the Love of God as Friend - Philia. These are powerful images at a very personal level.

There was, however, one drawback at this stage of her thinking (1987), which is that McFague did not "understand" the meaning/role/importance of the Holy Spirit: she perceived the "Holy Ghost" in a negative light as "amorphous, vague, and colorless"[35]. When asked about this, she admitted very forcefully that "I got that wrong. I got that wrong."; a truly delightful outburst.[36]

---

[33] I would define postmodernism as the age following the Death of Science as God. It begins with the proposal by Monsignor Georges Henri Joseph Édouard Lemaître in 1927 of what became known as the Big Bang theory of the origin of the Universe, although he called it his "hypothesis of the primeval atom". This is true irony that a priest should be the cause of the death of science as God.

[34] *Models of God* xi

[35] *Models of God* 170

[36] Personal communication 2009

## 2.4 CREATION - THE BODY OF GOD

Having begun the development of her metaphorical theology and having begun the remythologising of the metaphors of God as Mother, Lover and Friend, McFague introduced in 1993 her thesis of the embodiment of God; that is creation as the *Body of God.*

In developing her premises at this stage, her point was that the dominant models have led us to the situation in which we are destroying our ability to live on this planet: "We are dealing with a wily, crafty enemy: ourselves, and the perpetrators of the ecological crisis."[37] The degree to which this premise is entirely tenable is debatable, but that notwithstanding, it is quite obvious that huge areas of the planet have been rendered uninhabitable for life of any but the most primitive kinds. This analysis leads her to a review of our appreciation of body. It is not encouraging: "The ambivalence and at times abhorrence that we see in Christianity, feminism, and ecology in regard to the body – in all its manifestations – indicates a deep sickness in our culture: self-hatred."[38]

McFague has already declared that "[a] Christian lifestyle modeled on God as parent [mother or father], lover, and friend would be one committed to the impartial continuation of life in its many forms, the healing and reunification of all dimensions of life, and the sharing of the basic needs of life as well as its joys."[39] However, she now addresses the importance of body, of our embodiment. To do this she explores what she terms the "organic model [of cosmology] derived from the common creation story [in which] both unity and difference are radicalized.[40]. She quotes Ian Barbour who wrote "Cosmology joins evolutionary biology, molecular biology, and ecology in showing the interdependence of all things. [...]From astrophysics we know our indebtedness to a

---

[37] *The body of God* 3
[38] *The body of God* 16
[39] *Models of God* 92
[40] *Models of God* 55

common legacy of physical elements. [...] The cosmos is all of one piece."[41] With these premises she is beginning to reconstruct; indeed with these premises she is working to remove the verticality, the hierarchies of the dominant discourse and replace it with horizontality. One can almost propose that she is arguing for the "flat universe".

McFague is now on solider ground. It is one thing to decry the condition of our planet, but by itself, it is sterile; fruitless if there is nothing to bring us beyond the decrying. It is quite another thing, however, to link the call for a new sensibility to the cosmology of postmodern science which is physically as well as organically evolutionary. It contains the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of postmodern science; properties that are absent in modern science. Indeed, it is all very refreshing.

All the while in the development of these new models of God, McFague is using what she refers to as the "Common Creation Story" (i.e. the understanding of the evolutionary cosmology of the Universe which began with the Big Bang) as the touch stone of her theological development. In other words she is using postmodern science, which provides her starting premise, as the means to develop her theology in a consistent manner. This is the case in particular for her model of creation as God's body.

Her use of science in this way is a major development of the premises of her theology because it allows her to link her ideas with postmodern developments in science. As she discusses at length, modern science has led us into the situation we find ourselves in. It is atomist, deterministic, Newtonian science which has brought us to our present hierarchical view of creation. Linked to this is the classic organic model which is expressed in the phrase "the Church as the body of Christ"; this she links with modern science.[42] At this stage in her theology, she sees this as a limitation.

But beginning in the second quarter of the 20th century science began to work its way out of a static, mechanistic view of the universe: it became fundamentally uncertain (e.g. Heisenberg uncertainty principle). It was the proposal by Georges Lemaître concerning the origin of the universe, dubbed the Big Bang by Fred Hoyle and experimentally

---

[41] *The body of God* 28, 220
[42] *The body of God* 30-38

verified for the first time by Edwin Hubble, that an evolutionary physical model of the universe was born. The Common Creation Story (CCS) is rich in its images of the physical evolution of the universe which is now linked to the common story of biological evolution proposed by Darwin. The important aspect of such an evolutionary model is that the universe is ever diversifying. Naturally, it does not point to a physical, biological summit, a finality; by implication "Man" is not the end point.

This approach using the models of postmodern science as her premises allowed McFague to develop insights in her discourse concerning God and creation. As she wrote "[t]he concern here is with the possibility of a theology of nature, that is, using the picture of reality coming to us from postmodern science as a way to reimagine the relation between God and the world."[43]

She writes: "The nature of my project is to embody the picture of reality from postmodern science in a model that will help us internalize its new sensibility in a way not just compatible with but enriched by Christian faith." In other words, "[...]it will embody the new creation story metaphorically using both contemporary science and Christian faith."[44]

In summary, the organic model McFague presents attempts to picture reality as composed of multitudes of embodied beings who presently constitute our planet that evolved during 4 billion years through the processes of change. This is an enticing image because this cosmology takes "creation" thoroughly out of the religious realm where it had long been encased, thus providing breathing room.[45] It is also enticing because it includes linked science models in the physical and biological spheres which provide both an evolutionary (non-static) map along with sets of characteristics of its components. Thus, it is at the same time a rich data base and an independent sounding board which can be used to image/evaluate the ensuing theological discourse. One can be at ease with this modeling technique and the theological methodology because it is non-judgemental. It is one thing

---

[43] *The body of God* 46
[44] *The body of God* 83
[45] I am here returning to McFague's insistence on the requirement to respect the integrity of both Faith and Creation.

to begin with a judgemental declaration for the need of a new sensibility, but it is refreshing to make use of independent criteria for developing the basis for that sensibility.

## 2.5 SUBJECT-SUBJECTS OR SUPER, NATURAL CHRISTIANS

In McFague's last three books she addresses the need for loving God's creation[46] but as she insists, more than that, we need to change the *way* we live as part of it[47]. We think in certain ways and we speak of them in concomitant ways and inevitably we live accordingly. This is a theme which she announced at the very beginning of her theological writing. Here she returns with even more vigour to her themes of a relational, interconnected and interdependent revisioning of ourselves, creation and God.

In *Super, Natural Christians* she is proposing several things. To begin with, the very title has an important message. We as Christians are used to seeing the supernatural as our goal, it is understood as part and parcel of God's promise to us, it is what we aspire to - the supernatural. It is in many ways the mainstay of our spirituality, of our prayer, meditation, and contemplation. She wants to put a comma between the two words, and in a sense bring us down to Earth, to live and particularly to love our horizontal status. She wants to replace our vertical (hierarchical) gaze of subject-object with a horizontal (interconnected) vision of subject-subjects. Her thesis then is: "Christian practice, loving God and neighbour *as subjects*, should be extended to nature."[48]

Her continuing premise is that we should relate to the "subjects" in nature in the same basic way that we are supposed to relate to God and other people. And again all of this has as its purpose to change our sensibility. The message of this book is that a Christian spirituality should be based on a subject to subject model of being, knowing and doing in place of the dominant subject-object model that we are used to. This would be our new sensibility. This is a theme which she has touched on continually in her work. We need to

---

[46] *Super, natural Christians*
[47] *Super, natural Christians, A New Climate for Theology*
[48] *Super, natural Christians* 1-2

think differently, we need to speak differently, and as a result we need to live differently. This is one of her basic premises.

In the vertical models, we are taught to meditate or even contemplate through prayer for our spiritual development. This is the "shape" we are used to: subject-object. To be sure in contemplation our purpose is to listen and be taken up, to allow entry to God-immanent, but it begins as me-other; to my knowledge it has yet to incorporate the God of Love as Friend. We must now develop a spirituality which will be integral with nature, with creation, with God's body. Unfortunately we are caught up by these words, they impose categories. We speak of our spirituality, our spiritual life as though it was other than our life, as though it were something special and not just part of the normal order.

Based on these premises, McFague develops her ideas of the new sensibility in various ways. In a lightly autobiographical section she describes how she gradually became aware of creation as subjects[49]. It was as she put it by seeing details. She was not just hiking in "Nature", she was in nature and it was multiple and multifarious. From this progressed her image of whether we bring a map or go for a hike, as metaphors of object and subjects. With a map we look at nature and use our map to find our way. Nature is objectified, reduced to a map as it were. To go on a hike we have to encounter nature and come to know its ways. By extension, in our usual sensibility, we come to a meeting armed with an agenda and it is often with great difficulty that we are able to listen.

## 2.6 FROM LOVING TO A WAY OF LIVING

Having urged us to love nature, creation, McFague realised that this was not so much the problem as was the way we lived. Loving nature is not as obvious as the phrase might seem. Her thesis here has evolved into the need to live differently in order to love nature, and in order to live differently we needed to think differently.[50] This has always been a basic idea in her writing; we think certain ideas, we use a certain language about them

[49] *The body of God* 36ff
[50] *Life abundant* 3

and as a result we live by them. The triptych recurs whenever she has to fall back and rethink her ideas and bring them forward again rephrased and enriched.

The premise of her book *Life Abundant* is unique and quite different from her previous beginnings. Instead of developing an intellectual premise, she sets herself the task of testing her personal Credo. She puts herself and her beliefs on the line. Her intention is to see "[...]how a few beliefs which I now hold undeniably can function as a working theology for the ecological and justice crises facing our planet[...]"[51]

Her Credo:

> I believe in God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life; in Jesus Christ, in whom we see God at work for the flourishing of life; and in the Spirit, who works in us so we might live from, toward, and with God. This trinitarian God is "God with us", as our Source, our Way, and our Goal. This God is radically transcendent and radically immanent: the one who is more awesome than all the galaxies in the universe and nearer to us than our own breath. This God is the One who invites all of us into community to live and flourish together as God's beloved.[52]

To translate this credo into action, she proposes to undertake theology which she sees as an essentially practical activity not a primarily intellectual one. As she says "[f]or Christians, right living occurs when we bring our wills into line with God's[...]". Her theological development in this book is well summarized in her quote from Robert Costnaza:

> Probably the most challenging task facing humanity today is the creation of a shared vision of a sustainable and desirable society, one that can provide permanent prosperity within the biophysical constraints of the real world in a way that is fair and equitable to all of humanity, to other species, and to future generations.[53]

It includes all of the basic elements that she develops; "shared vision", "sustainable society", "permanent prosperity", within "biophysical constraints" and most importantly "all of humanity, [...]other species". Her message in this book and her most recent one *A New Climate for Theology*, is that our planet and its living inhabitants can only deal with

---

[51] *Life abundant* 4
[52] *Life abundant* 23
[53] *Life abundant* 99

so much from what we do to it. Our horizon at this moment in time is limited to ourselves, individually; McFague is arguing that we have to broaden our horizon to all of our Earth.

## 2.7 LIFE ABUNDANT IN A NEW CLIMATE

To provide abundant life to all that is living on Earth, we have to devise a new way of living, a new economy, and we will have to do it sooner than later because the Earth is showing signs that its climate can no longer support what we are doing to it. "The shock of realizing that our high-energy consumer lifestyle is sending the Earth into potential disaster is a wake-up call."[54] Her premise is that "we are approaching the tipping point in global temperature that will change the basic conditions for the flourishing of life."

She is a theologian, what must she do as such? Her response: "I want to suggest that theology within the context of climate change must focus on deconstructing and reconstructing two key doctrines: *who we are* and *who God is.*"[55] To accomplish this, McFague first anchors herself in the contemporary scientific world view, specifically the science of global warming. In fact she bases herself on the Fourth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations.[56] Its main thrust is to present an international policy response to the summaries and conclusions of the science. As she explained, she did this so that there was "no way that the politicians could weasel out, find a way around the conclusions to which so many scientists had come."[57]

Thus it is in *A New Climate for Theology* her starting point is to develop her story with a renewed and even more intimate relationship to science. In the face of the dire predictions of the future of the environment of our planet, based on digital models and an

---

[54] *A New Climate for Theology* 1
[55] My emphasis
[56] IPCC 2007
[57] Personal communication – November 2009

overwhelming diversity of studies, she is forced to adopt a very pessimistic view of the future if we do not radically change our ways. She found in this huge body of science an either-or juncture: if we continue what we have been doing to the natural environment, these are the scientifically predicted results. And we only have so much time in which to act. It is a compelling message. We have no choice, we must change our way of living.

Her earliest premises then come to the fore and the link between justice and ecological issues becomes evident. As she describes it, it is the dualistic, hierarchical mode of Western thought in which a superior and an inferior are correlated: male-female, white people-people of color, heterosexual-homosexual, able-bodied – physically-challenged, culture-nature, mind-body, human/non-human. It is these correlatives that are at the root of the way we think and talk and therefore at the root of the way we live.

McFague has the perception, indeed the conviction that we are in the midst of a geophysical and biophysical calamity. Many would conjecture that this would lead her to respond with an ecological theology, but in fact she brings forward again in fresh words her metaphorical theology.[58] This is her root theology. She is seeking her "activist" participation, in the face of the perceived realities, in metaphor and model as the language of transcendence. In other words she is seeking to talk of God and can only do it in metaphor because as she explains, it is an "in-between strategy" avoiding the presumption of *via positiva* and the silence of *via negativa.*[59] And so she comes back to her thesis that creation is God's Body.[60]

## 2.8 TO WHOM IS MCFAGUE ADDRESSING HER THEOLOGY?

---

[58] *A New Climate for Theology* 107-119
[59] *A New Climate for Theology* 107
[60] *A New Climate for Theology* 112

I have avoided till now raising the question of the identity of McFague's audience and by implication whether I am part of that audience. From the very beginning of her theological writing she is very explicit. Her audience is white, Christian, middle class, American; elsewhere we might say WASP, but she is specifically addressing Americans. Her most recent version appears in the preface to Life Abundant, "I realized that we middle-class North American Christians are destroying nature[...]".[61] It should be noted that North has been added to the audience profile.

But why such an apparently limited audience? Because while we are only 75 % of the North American population and only 5 % of the world population, we alone account for 24 % of the world's energy consumption. It indicates that our impact on the environment is completely disproportional to our numbers. Furthermore and of equal importance, McFague knows this audience, she comes from the middle class, has taught the middle class, and understands their underpinnings.

While reading her work one sometimes feels ill at ease, somewhat attacked if not directly pointed at. And why is this? It is because McFague talks directly to her audience, she says what she says and says clearly why she is saying it. An example of this is the following challenge:

> We Westerners all perceive with the arrogant eye. If you doubt this, answer the following question: How important would creation be if we were not part of it? Can we honestly say, "It is good!" and mean it?[62]

So when she talks about the "aggressive eye", she is talking about the typical "eye" of her audience.

A further dimension of this is her discovery of where she has been coming from. In the opening of her book *Life Abundant*,[63] McFague gives us a brief autobiographical account of her spiritual growth which she summarises in her personal Credo. What she explains is that finally after years of talking *about* God, she became acquainted *with* God. This has been a recent development in her life. In a parallel to another theologian she had been an

---

[61] *Life abundant* xi

[62] *The body of God* 34 My spontaneous answer to this was that I can and do say "Yes". It was God who said it first, and furthermore it is the basis for my belief that Creation is a sacrament.

[63] *Life abundant* 3

"academic Christian, becoming a practicing Christian and finally an embodied "present" one".[64] As she said, till this discovery there was still a piece missing in her work and that piece was herself. This is both fascinating and crucial to her theology, because while she mastered her audience and the context of her theology, she had not entirely mastered herself as theologian. It is very humbling to read this.

## 2.9 CONCLUSIONS

McFague has used scientific models in two ways to develop her theology, her understanding of our relationship to God's creation. The first way has been as a guide to help direct the development of her ideas. She has sought to use scientific modeling to develop appropriate ones for her metaphorical theology. The second way has been to test the soundness of her ideas, to measure their consistency against postmodern scientific understanding of the Universe and our Earth. However, she has not been limited by these models, as helpful as they were; she quite peacefully was able to move beyond them when they could no longer be extended. This left her to her own theology. Her purpose in doing this was to provide herself with as realistic a context as possible. Her use of the Common Creation Story, postmodern cosmology, has profound implications which have not been truly incorporated into Christian doctrine.

Unfortunately, however, certain of the models upon which she ultimately relied, particularly the predictions about the future of Earth's climate, include faulty science at crucial points in the argument and a reliance on digital models which do not capture the complexity of climate and are admittedly unsuitable for making projections. This not withstanding, the basic methodology that she has employed to develop her premises and starting points is valid. Furthermore, the ethical imperatives which McFague so

---

[64] *Life abundant* 6-8

masterfully develops are vital. Put quite simply, we cannot continue to think and talk and live as we have been; it is an injustice against the Body of God.

Finally, the beginning of McFague's theology, her initial starting points, germinated in the 1960's with the "Death of God", in vogue at that time. Theology and philosophy had come to a cul-de-sac and modern science was the new God. At the time, she strongly reacted against the hegemony of religion and that of modern science and technology. The death of modern science was already under way, though it was not so obvious because its death was rooted in very difficult theoretical physics of postmodern science. Thus in many analogous ways she participated in the "end run of theology", abandoning the dried (sic) and true, and "playing" with a heuristic and intermediary theology which required a whole new set of premises and anchoring points. In several ways this was already underway in liberation theology, though not yet very prominently.

# CHAPTER 3

# CHAPTER 3: MCFAGUE'S METAPHORICAL THEOLOGY

McFague's developed her metaphorical theology progressively before she put it into contexts which are entirely accessible to us in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The first three books deal directly with her theology and are focused on metaphor,[65] parable[66] and models for speaking of God.[67] Her fourth book is transitional, in it she develops a very specific model.[68] It lays the foundation for her three last books which place her theology in contexts that are familiar without being common place, and which can be unequivocally understood today (Chapter 4).

In this Chapter, I present systematically the development of her theology as presented in the first four essays, as she refers to them. They constitute the essential theoretical and methodological core of her theology.

## 3.1 PARABLES: EXTENDED METAPHORS

McFague began her project, *Speaking in Parables: a study in metaphor and theology*, with a statement of what theology should achieve; it is "to make it possible for the gospel to be heard in our time."[69] This is her purpose.[70] And while she is well aware of her times, she insists that risks must be taken to fulfill that challenge. Her assumption in the very beginning "is that theology could better fulfill this function were it to attend to Jesus' parables as models of theological reflection, for the parables keep "in solution" the language, belief, and life we are called to, and hence they address people totally."[71] Her point is that the gospels are not a collection of ideas to be pondered but stories about

---

[65] *Speaking in parables*
[66] *Metaphorical Theology*
[67] *Models of God*
[68] *The body of God*
[69] *Speaking in parables* 1
[70] Stylistic note: This essay is written primarily in the present tense instead of the cumbersome past tense, which would be usual in a shorter text.
[71] *Speaking in parables* 1-2

people in relation to their world that are to be contemplated. This is the essential message of the whole of her work.

The rationale for her theology is that the parable is a prime genre of scripture and was the privileged manner of Jesus' teaching. She extends this by asserting that if Jesus as the parable of God, as well as Jesus' parables are taken as models of theological reflection, we have a form that insists on uniting language with belief and living. As McFague wrote: "A theology that takes its cues from the parables finds that the genres most closely associated with it are the poem, the novel, and the autobiography, since these genres manifest the ways that metaphors operate in language, belief and life."[72] She is here setting the foundation of her attempt to say an intermediate or parabolic theology; one that is neither parable nor systematic, but is faithful to the parables.

The metaphor is a way of knowing; in the metaphor knowledge and its expression are one. Thus the metaphors that Jesus is the Messiah or Jesus is the Logos include a particular insight or revelation. This is perhaps the central importance of metaphor for McFague. She extends this same insight to the parable when she asserts that the parables are extended metaphors. It does not mean that the parable has a point, but rather that it is itself what the parable is talking about. Thus as an extended metaphor, "the meaning is found with the story itself although it is not exhausted by that story".[73]

But what is it that lies behind or beneath this analysis of metaphor? Fundamentally it is that "language of a people is their sense of reality. [...] If the language is one dimensional then we lead one-dimensional lives."[74] Her concern then is with the importance, the vitality of our language. It is tempting here to recall the expression of the "good news". McFague is confronting the emptiness of her times, the dustiness of religious discourse. "It will be through the search for new metaphors – poems, stories, even lives – which will "image" to us, in our total existential unity, the compassion of the father, the bright wings

---

[72] *Speaking in parables* 3
[73] *Speaking in parables* 13
[74] *Speaking in parables* 23

of the bird, the trustworthiness of a world in which parents keep promises to their children."[75] The challenge McFague sets is that "it will not be enough to simply attempt a renewal of Christian symbols and traditional language." It is the more basic hermeneutical task of understanding the creative imagination as that which uniquely allows us to see and say what is conceptually imperceptible and inexpressible. She suggests that we have no choice as intelligent beings but to re-appropriate such basic language as metaphors or turn back to the language of theology in its infancy: "Augustine realised that it was either silence or metaphor."[76] McFague becomes more explicit in that all we have is the grid or screen provided by this or that metaphor to the "Truth". Nothing else leads us nearly close enough in our grasping after certainty. Inevitably "the acceptance of the necessity of metaphorical language means also the acceptance of risk, of open-endedness, of scepticism". She finally puts the cards of her thesis on the table: "This is basically what I want to say. [...] The meaning of the gospel is generated through metaphor, through words which we "know" but which are now put into a new context so that we see "what is" in the light of "what might be", the ordinary emerges shaped by a new context."[77] This is the theology that McFague wants to bring forward and why metaphor and parable are so central to that enterprise.

What has been described so far is referred to by McFague as the "Near Tradition"; this is what has been considered as ways out of the dustiness, the tiredness, the bleakness of our times. However, what was the way of the "Far Tradition - the New Testament"? The answer is direct: "The gospels and parables are not histories but re-enactments of good news – dramatic narratives that "say" the same thing that the big story, the story of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection says."[78] Throughout the New Testament its authors are relating their understanding of something "unfamiliar and strange coming clear to them in and through the mundanity of a human life". The word of God is opened up to them through the unfolding of Jesus' life as they saw it, recounting it as it came to them. McFague here makes a fundamental statement in her theology "through the life and death

---

[75] *Speaking in parables* 23
[76] *Speaking in parables* 29
[77] *Speaking in parables* 30
[78] *Speaking in parables* 36

of Jesus, that basic metaphor became the touchstone for creating hundreds of other metaphors". She sees Christ as the metaphor of his father. Here at the start of her theology we have the beginning of the Christology which she necessarily pursues throughout her reflection, because it is essential to any Christian theology. It is essential in the sense that "it becomes the touchstone for all other metaphors in all ages, including our own" As she asserts: "New Testament language, then, and its principal form – the story, both as parable and as the story of Jesus – is metaphorical."[79] McFague is not only declaring what she means by tradition but is also demonstrating at this early stage her fundamental awareness of its centrality in her life and that of her audience.

McFague is also staking out the terrain of her central thesis. Metaphor is how we speak, it is perhaps the fundamental way that we can speak. And as such when we speak of God we can only use metaphor because that is how we understand and thus it is only in metaphor that we can be spoken to so that we can understand. The Word then is a metaphor. As she explains: "In a religious metaphor, [...] the two subjects, ordinary life and the transcendent, are so intertwined that there is no way of separating them out and, in fact, what we learn is not primarily something about God but a new way to live ordinary life."[80] Here again she is presenting a theme which she returns to in various ways and most especially when she delves into specific contexts of her theology. As she said, the parables suggest a new context, provided by God, for perceiving ordinary life, which becomes our principle focus; "the world of the parable includes both the ordinary and the transcenden". The ordinary, the world around us, is thus transformed by God. Religious metaphor does not "take us out of ourselves" rather it returns us to ourselves with new insight.[81] As she explains; "it is not a mystical, static, intellectual vision, but an insight into how ordinary human life and events can be made to move beyond themselves by connecting them to this and to that. [M]etaphor creates the new, it does not embellish the old, and it accomplishes this through seeing similarity in dissimilar."[82] She is suggesting here that old discourse needs to be revitalised, that old metaphors need to be

---

[79] *Speaking in parables* 38
[80] *Speaking in parables* 45
[81] *Speaking in parables* 48
[82] *Speaking in parables* 49

rejuvenated. She asserts that ordinary language is metaphorical. Thus she is not proposing anything new, but simply that we consciously use what it is that we do when we speak; to examine the common religious metaphors, and from within that analysis, propose metaphors better adapted to our times.

Though in fear of saying the obvious, a cursory reading of the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament, reveals the dramatic contrast in nearly every aspect of religious discourse. It is a renewal of discourse that McFague is undertaking. She develops this need for renewal in an analysis of three writers, Cassirer, Barfield and Ricœur, each of whom developed the understanding that the outer points to the inner, that the new part of the metaphor brings to light some part of the old part. But it is while quoting Paul Ricœur[83] that McFague is clear about her immediate intent and presages her life's work.

> Every symbol is finally a hierophany, a manifestation of the bond between man and the sacred. [...]Finally then it is as an index of the situation of man at the heart of being in which he moves, exists, and wills, that the symbol speaks to us. [...] All the symbols of guilt, deviation, wandering, captivity, -all the myths- chaos, blinding, mixture, fall, -speak of the situation of the being of man in the being of the world.[84]

Wittingly or unwittingly, McFague is plunging her theology into creation, its fundamental context. As she wrote, "[m]etaphor unites us to our world at a level below subject-object, mind-body; it is the nexus of "man in the being of the world", the intimation of our original unity with all that is."[85] She further cites a later article by Ricoeur in which he makes the closest possible connection between metaphor and reality.[86]

> [...]a discourse which makes use of metaphor has the extraordinary power of redescribing reality. [...] If this analysis is sound, we should have to say that metaphor not only shatters the previous structures of our language but also

---

[83] Ricœur, Paul, 1960, Finitude et culpabilité: Tome II. La symbolique du mal. Paris, Aubier, 335p. 331
[84] Ricœur, Paul, 1969, *The symbolism of evil.* Beacon Press, 362p. quoted in *Speaking in parables*, 56
[85] *Speaking in parables* 56
[86] *Speaking in parables* 56 Footnote.

> the previous structures of what we call reality. But if we assume that metaphor redescribes reality, we must then assume that this reality as redescribed is itself novel reality. [...] With metaphor we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality.[87]

If this is sound and logical, then McFague has resisted a temptation here and in the future to claim more for her work than she does because the very task that she embarks on is to analyse old and propose new metaphors more attuned to our reality and comprehensible in our day. And surely to that extent, she is the agent of a certain metamorphosis of reality. She is well aware of the central importance of metaphor. "Metaphor is the language of "a body that thinks"; it is, therefore, neither an embellishment of language nor a primitive form to be superseded by conceptual language, but *the* method of human thought."[88] Or as Elizabeth Sewell said, it is the human method of investigating the universe.[89]

For McFague, a parable "as a genuine metaphor, it is not translatable into concepts." [90] The parable points to something beyond itself; however, all genuine parables are themselves actuality - "the parables are figurative representations of an actual, total meaning, so they do not "stand for" anything but *are* life." As noted, the parable takes us beyond itself. "Metaphorical language, parabolic language, does not take us out of everyday reality but drives us more deeply into it, de-forming our usual apprehensions in such a way that we see that reality in a new way."[91] Furthermore we do not interpret parables, rather they interpret us. "This watchword of the new hermeneutic is [...] simply the consequence of taking the parable as metaphor seriously."[92] It cannot, because it does not *have* a message, it *is* a message. In this regard she quotes Dodd:

> At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaving

---

[87] Ricœur 1973, *Creativity in Language: word, polysemy, metaphor.* Philosophy Today, v.17:2,p.97-111. 111

[88] *Speaking in parables* 60

[89] Sewell, Elizabeth, 1964, *The human metaphor.* South Bend ID, University of Notre Dame Press, 212p. 11

[90] *Speaking in parables* 67 - This supposition has been contested as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

[91] *Speaking in parables* 70

[92] *Speaking in parables* 71

> the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise applications to tease it into active thought.[93]

As he explained further on: "The typical parable, whether it be a simple metaphor, or a more elaborate similitude, or a full-length story, presents one single point of comparison. The details are not intended to have independent significance."[94]

This discussion of metaphor and parable inevitably lead McFague to ask how they allow or are a discourse about God. The parables are both real and strange, they embody a voice and they present a challenge. Jesus' parables are secular and mundane, as she says; this realism is the way that the Judaic-Christian tradition has handled the matter of speaking of the divine.[95] Their strangeness is in part related to the fact that important things happen and are decided at the everyday level. They are not "great" events just ordinary, mundane, repeated happenings. As McFague says, it is the nature of metaphors and of the parables as metaphors that the underlying assumption in the Bible is such that this is how the divine and the human orders are related.[96] Hence the shock or strangeness is in seeing the familiar in a new way. It is no longer the mundane but nor is it "the divine", but it does point to that and ultimately it points to how it is that we are to live the every-day. "A parable of Jesus[...]is a call to decision issued from one who in some way or other is himself a parable, or, as Christians believe the parable of God."[97]

Thus parables take us beyond the immediate and into new enterprises. Their impact is directly tied to their insistence that insight be embodied, incarnated. "But the uncanny and unnerving aspect of the New Testament parables is that the peculiar insight they are connected with, believing in a loving God[...]must be embodied, incarnated in human lives, not in the head alone but in and through the full scope and breadth of human life."

---

[93] Dodd, C.H., 1961, *The parables of the Kingdom*. William Collins and Sons, Glasgow,160p. 16
[94] *Speaking in parables* 18
[95] *Speaking in parables* 76
[96] *Speaking in parables* 77
[97] *Speaking in parables* 78 Interesting play on words.

The goal of a parable is in the realm of willing, not of knowing.[98] It is in this way that they constitute a function of our identity.

I began this section with McFague's rationale of the mission of theology. I will end it with her pleading for the need of what she has called a redeployment of an intermediary theology, dependant on parable which she contrasts to the dominant theology dependent on gospel or kerygma. Her point is that both are needed so as to respect the literary form of the Bible and lead to embodiment, and that systematic theology will ensure the "mystery laid bare" will be respected. Her idea is that in systematic theology mystery is taken out of solution, the parable which is the "dominant mode of discourse in which Jesus taught." Robert Funk put it more incisively, "the mystery of the kingdom held in solution in the parables precisely as mystery, tends to be profaned, made public, by the Kerygma Gospel."[99] For McFague the literary form is crucial, citing Ricoeur: "The "confession of faith" which is expressed in the biblical documents is inseparable from the forms of discourse. [T]he finished work which we call the Bible is a limited space for interpretation in which the theological significations are correlatives of forms of disclosure."[100] Thus for McFague, because theological discourse has been almost exclusively discursive and conceptual, it needs "radical correction" or most seriously re-equilibration by the "mystery in solution". Her argument is not to replace one theology with another, it is her concern to present a theology which will address the needs of today better, that the good news will be heard in our time.

In this first section we have presented the theoretical and methodological bases for McFague's metaphorical theology. This has included her understanding of metaphorical and parabolic discourse which had been undergoing a major examination since at least the 1940s and at the time of this first of her volumes had reached full maturity. This examination was largely in response to the waning of the historical-scientific exegesis

---

[98] *Speaking in parables* 79

[99] Funk, Robert Walter, 1966, *Language, hermeneutic, and word of God : the problem of language in the New Testament and contemporary theology*. Harper & Row, 317*p*. 71 quoted in *Speaking in parables* 81

[100] Ricœur, Paul, 1974, *Philosophy and religious language*. The Journal of Religion, v.54:1,*p*.71-85. 76 quoted in *Speaking in parables* 82

which had begun in the late 19th century, and which has been vital in the renewal of the understanding of the Bible. Further impetus for the interest in the literary form of the Bible was partially in response to the low ebb of interest in Christian religions in general in the mid-20th century. Most of the theological and philosophical work at this time was in reaction to the general malaise following from the Reformation, the Enlightenment and resulting in modernity. Specifically McFague has introduced the basis for a parabolic theology which "locates its source not in doctrines and systems but in what lies behind them – in language, belief and lifestyles that have attempted to be metaphors of Christian faith."[101]

The new insights that emerge through language and belief are tested in life. I will examine the specifics of language and belief in the next section.

### 3.2 MODELS OF GOD IN RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

In her second book, *Metaphorical theology: models of God in religious language*, McFague proposes the transformation of our way of thinking from a "description" of God to "images" of God. The guiding basis is relationship and how it is structured. She deals with the problem posed by religious language, its relevance, its idolatry and how scientific models can be brought to bear, 'as models', in developing relevant theological models. As she states in the preface, she is attending to the movement from imagistic language of metaphor and parable to conceptual, theological language. The first is the base and funding for the second.[102] Her hope was that she might provide a way to trace this movement which is influenced by her own tradition of Protestantism and arises from her own sensibility and personal faith.

Our problem is that unlike the world of our ancestors, we do not live in a sacramental universe where everything is connected to and permeated by divine power and love; we

---

[101] *Speaking in parables* 91, 146
[102] *Metaphorical theology* ix

are no longer living in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, we still use a religious language which, unconnected as it is, becomes idolatrous and irrelevant. Though our language might remain religious, the associated images have been lost and it is in this sense that we are now no longer living in a sacramental universe.[103]

The remedy is to be found in the pluralism of contexts of the interpretations of the religious words and therefore the plurality of the many perspectives which different peoples bring. Inevitably these pluralities of contexts and interpretations must confront what has grown in parallel that is, orthodoxy. Notwithstanding this, McFague asserts that "[i]f we lose sight of the relativity and plurality of the interpretive context, our religious language, [...]will become idolatrous or irrelevant."[104] By idolatrous she means that the words that we use to talk of God, because they come from the Bible which is "inerrant and divinely inspired", it becomes an idol. In other words, the human words in scripture are understood as referring correctly and literally to God. This idolatry is the consequence of several aspects of our modern culture. "What is true in our positivistic, scientifically oriented society is what corresponds with 'reality'. In religious terms, 'true' religious language is a copy of what it represents". If the Bible says that God is 'father' then God is literally 'father'. The word and its associations truly refer to God's nature.[105] She suggests that this can be explained in part by the fact that we no longer understand images as in the past. The names we use for things are simply what they are; God the father is 'father'.

We can grasp why religious language is in danger of being idolatrous, but why has it become irrelevant? Why have we become indifferent to it? Her basic argument is that biblical language excludes virtually every one; a pretty broad stroke! This is so because the assumptions of biblical language "concerning social, political, and cultural matters are not ours".[106] Furthermore particular groups are excluded most notably those who have now developed a liberation theology including the poor and women. It is remarkable

---

[103] *Metaphorical theology* 1
[104] *Metaphorical theology* 2
[105] *Metaphorical theology* 5
[106] *Metaphorical theology* 8

to see this same commentary by José Pagola in his recent book.[107] As McFague writes, whoever names the world owns the world.[108] But furthermore, with respect to women, it is the patriarchal language. As such 'God the father' is fine, however, it has become virtually the model of the nature of God and most particularly of our relation to the divine. Because it is an all encompassing model it is no longer merely one of several reference models. It is has become dominant to the degree that Father becomes God's name and thereby patriarchy becomes the governing relationship at different levels.[109]

The implicit idolatry and the irrelevance of our religious language are of crucial importance; therefore she asks whether it can be revitalized. The question is central because the words we use are in an important sense sacramental. "Is it possible to have significant religious language, language that is true and meaningful, without classic sacramentalism?"[110] How else will we recover this language if the sacrament of the incarnation, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us", cannot be understood, in that the words are in a static and hierarchical order? What McFague is attempting to recover here is the dynamic of the natural and supernatural orders and in particular of the divine immanence. As discussed in the previous section, language is not just something else. It is our means of understanding; in a real sense it is a sacrament or at least a window. As an example, she turns to Gerald Manley Hopkins who said that the natural, including the human, is "news of God". In other words *we* "show forth" the divine. However, this lacks restlessness, moving, growing - dynamism. The bread and wine become the body and blood, they become symbols and are consumed by what they represent.[111] This leads her to write that "all that is "refers" to Being-Itself and has "meaning", both in itself and as a symbol."[112] The words point to a profound similarity beneath the surface dissimilarities.

---

[107] Pagola, José A., 2009, *Jesus: an historical aproximation.* Convivium Press, 560p. 35
[108] *Metaphorical theology* 8
[109] *Metaphorical theology* 9. And, for example, Ratzinger (2007 140) writes that "...the prayer language of the entire bible remains normative for us..."
[110] *Metaphorical theology* 11
[111] *Metaphorical theology* 11
[112] *Metaphorical theology* 12

Her doubt here is that she does not think it realistic to expect that we can "work ourselves back into this mentality. [...] If the destiny of religious language depends on a belief that symbols participate in a transcendent reality, [...]the future for religious language is grim. [I]n effect we have not had such a sensibility since the Reformation."[113] This is a crucial turning point in the development her theology because "[t]o Luther, the bread and the wine were still symbols of Christ's body and blood but they participated in a way that I would call "metaphorical. [T]he assertions "This is my body" and "This is my blood" include a silent but present negative. [M]etaphorical statements always contain the whisper, "*it is and it is not.*""[114] She is drawing here a distinction made earlier, between the Protestant "metaphorical" tradition and the Catholic symbolic or analogic tradition; she understands them as complementary. "The most sophisticated revitalisations of the symbolic, sacramental tradition interpret it analogically, [...] a metaphorical perspective does see connections but they are of a tensive, discontinuous and surprising nature."[115]

Underlying her discussion so far is the reality of modernity; implicitly she is asking what has this done to us and how do we proceed. But it is not so easy to continue with a theology that has to be rooted in its time and space because she will have to show that *metaphorical theology* is indigenous to Christianity and that it is called for. She confronts the alternatives in this way:

> [Catholic tradition] moves from an awareness of harmony, taking the negativities into account, while [Protestant sensibility] moves from an awareness of the negativities, reaching toward a future harmony. [T]he Protestant sensibility is more characteristic of our time and is the place from which we must start.[116]

The central message of Jesus was to announce the 'kingdom of God'; it has arrived, we are now in its midst. The dominant genre of his teaching is parables and metaphors. He was speaking to simple people, he used simple language. It is not a symbolic or allegorical language. Of basic importance, of course, is that metaphor is the basis of our

---

[113] *Metaphorical theology* 12
[114] *Metaphorical theology* 13
[115] *Metaphorical theology* 14
[116] *Metaphorical theology* 14 - She is addressing white middle-class Americans and essentially Calvinists of some form or other.

thought and language, it is our ordinary way of conversing, even if we are not aware of it. Thus the use of metaphor in religious language is not introducing something new, it is doing the ordinary. Furthermore, because metaphor and parable find the similar in the dissimilar, "parabolic Christology does not involve an assumption of continuity or identity between the human and the divine. [...] It is a Christology for the Protestant sensibility and the modern mentality."[117] With this, McFague is both defining the basis of her theology and linking it directly to her audience as described in Chapter 2.

"A metaphorical theology, then, starts with the parables of Jesus and with Jesus as parable of God. Thus while based on the Bible it does not require believing that it is an absolute in the sense that it is 'the Word of God'."[118] In this way she sees the Bible "as confessions of faith by people who, on the basis of the way their lives were changed by Jesus' Gospel and by Jesus, gave authority to him and to the writings about him." She does not consider the Bible as absolute or authoritative except in the sense that "it continues to speak to us."[119] "What must always be kept in mind is that the parables as metaphors and the life of Jesus as a metaphor of God provide characteristics for theology: a theology guided by them is open-ended, tentative, indirect, tensive, iconoclastic, transformative."[120]

The parables are characteristically relational, they tell us what people do rather than who they are. In a way similar to the relation of God to his people as described in the Old Testament, so in the New there is a focus on people and their way of being in community. In a parallel way we see Jesus in relation to us "in loving service and transforming power with other persons." If Jesus has come to reveal his Father to us, it is not simply in words but in deeds, in relationship; he heals, he comforts, he goes to the marginal, the excluded, the impure. And so we are left with a litany of "images of God as father, mother, lover, friend, savior, ruler, governor, servant, companion, comrade, liberator".[121] Such a litany is necessary in a metaphorical theology "both to avoid idolatry and to attempt to express the

---

[117] *Metaphorical theology* 18
[118] *Metaphorical theology* 19
[119] *Metaphorical theology* 19
[120] *Metaphorical theology* 19
[121] *Metaphorical theology* 21

richness and variety of the divine-human relationship."[122] It is also necessary to "underscore that it is not a patriarchal language".[123] On the contrary all these images and models come from the New Testament; however, except for a few, most of them have been set aside. McFague is quite definite: "The dominance of the patriarchal model is idolatrous in its assumption of privileged appropriateness." In contrast to this, "[a] metaphorical theology will emphasize personal, relational categories in its language about God".[124] Thus to say that "God is Father" is both true and not true and when true it does not convey the same view as conventional patriarchal fatherhood.[125]

A theology cannot limit itself only to its primary sources; thus metaphorical theology must build on the images of metaphors and the parables with conceptual tools and most specifically with religious models. These are necessary to move beyond metaphorical to conceptual language. Thus 'God the father' is a metaphor but one which also serves as a model "which helps us to organize our thoughts about a less familiar subject [God] by means of seeing it in terms of a more familiar one [father]".[126] The linking of metaphors with models is both enriching and a safeguard. Metaphors need models so as to come to terms with the plethora of metaphors of God but models need the grounding of metaphors because models "tend to object to competition". The risk is in the literalization of models. To conceive the model, interpretations are developed, choices are made which represent priorities within religious traditions. So as to maintain the equilibrium it is necessary to apply conceptual interpretation and criticism.

She sets four tasks for her metaphorical theology:

1. to understand the centrality of models in the Christian tradition
2. to criticize literalized, exclusive models
3. to chart the relationships among metaphors, models and concepts
4. to investigate the possibilities for transformative, revolutionary models.

---

[122] *Metaphorical theology* 20
[123] *Metaphorical theology* 21
[124] *Metaphorical theology* 21
[125] *Metaphorical theology* 21
[126] *Metaphorical theology* 23

Her goal in this is "to question the didactic tradition of orthodoxy over the more kerygmatic point of view epitomized in the parables and Jesus as parable."[127]

Metaphor is to be found in all ways of life and in every culture, in all ways of speaking, thinking, and knowing. Metaphor is considered to be unsubstitutable; we cannot speak a metaphor in some other way. It is not a trope, it is instead the way that thought and language works. A metaphor necessarily contains "two active thoughts which remain in permanent tension with each other."[128] To create that tension, the two components are sufficiently unconventional and shocking, which constitutes the "is and is not" attribute. Furthermore the two components are mutually transformed and as a result a metaphor is essentially concerned with meaning, it speaks meaning in that it goes beyond its components. She quotes Nelson Goodman: "a metaphor is simply a juvenile fact, and a fact a senile metaphor." [129] Can we still hear the metaphor 'This is my Body'? Though possibly a harsh comparison, this might characterize the difference in colours between the didactic and kerygmatic approaches mentioned earlier.

Metaphors, and by extension parables, constitute all or nearly all of the language used by the Bible to refer to God. This is singularly important. In the Old Testament the imagery is both personal and relational in character. In parallel to this, "[i]t is no surprise when we turn to the New Testament to find that Jesus' chief metaphor for God is a personal one – that of *abba* – and that his parables are concerned with relations among persons."[130] His choice of this form of father is particularly familiar and in a sense is an image of the intimate relationship he had during his life among us. His parables and his way as a parable are a judgement or assertion of similarity and difference between two "thoughts" in permanent tension with one another: one is the ordinary conventional way, and the other is the extraordinary way, the way of the Kingdom.[131] McFague continues,

---

[127] *Metaphorical theology* 28
[128] *Metaphorical theology* 37
[129] *Metaphorical theology* 40
[130] *Metaphorical theology* 43
[131] *Metaphorical theology* 45

paraphrasing C.H. Dodd,[132] that the point of a parable is not a moral concept or resolution but the play of the interactive partners which "teases" the imagination into participatory thinking. At the heart of the tension is "extravagance". On the one hand, there is a conventional even mundane scene, and on the other, events occur and decisions are made which are "absurd, radical, alien, extreme"[133]. The parables progress and end by breaking all the conventional understandings and expected reactions of Jesus' time whether it is the prodigal son's father, the one lost sheep or the tiny mustard seed. How could we anticipate that the prodigal son's father would react other than to be hurt, resentful, scornful? Who would waste their time for one lost sheep? How could we imagine a comparison of the Kingdom of the Almighty God to a mustard seed? As McFague puts it, these parables are "assaults on the accepted, conventional way of viewing reality; an assault on the social, economic, and mythic structures" of the times.[134] The impact is that the tensions result in profound disorientation. "The permanent function of parables is to enhance consciousness of the radical relativity of human models of reality". [135]

This view of the parable leads to two conclusions with respect to the basis of a metaphorical theology: [136]

- A theology influenced by the parables would be open-ended, tensive, secular, indirect, iconoclastic, and revolutionary.
- The focus is on relational life.

But how to deal with the symmetrical part of parables as revelatory, that is that Jesus is a parable of God? Here McFague quotes Crossan, Keck and Ricoeur: "Jesus concentrated on parabolic speech because he himself was a parabolic event of the kingdom of God."[137] This is not the top down teaching of orthodox Christology. Nor is it "the Word become flesh" of John. However, surely those listening to Jesus and witnessing his miracles only asked who he was after getting over the shock of what he did and what he said. John's gospel could only have been written 100 years after the birth of Christ; there was no way

---

[132] Dodd, C.H., 1961, *The parables of the Kingdom*. William Collins and Sons, Glasgow, 160p. 16
[133] *The parables of the Kingdom* 16
[134] *Metaphorical theology* 47
[135] *Metaphorical theology* 47
[136] *Metaphorical theology* 48
[137] *Metaphorical theology* 48

to come to this understanding without reflection; this needed time. "While one cannot today move from God to Jesus, neither can one have Jesus without God."[138] In effect, the teaching, the work, and the relationships of Jesus force the question of his person. "Jesus' work is *essential* [for a Christian?] for our understanding of God. Jesus as parable of God provides us with a grid, a matrix for understanding God's way with us which cannot be discarded after we have translated it into concepts."[139] Thus Jesus as parable redirects our understanding of God. He does not initiate it, in that in coming to Jesus one comes with preconceptions of God, of ourselves, and of our time; we are not a blank page. Nor can we collapse the two components, man and God, into one. In other words, metaphorical statements are never identity statements: hence Jesus is and is not God. This metaphorical Christology "has immense importance for Christian assessment of other religions which, based on the orthodox view of Jesus' identity with God, are excluded from significant revelation."[140] Parables then are secular, tensive, shocking, extravagant, disorienting, though they are equally reorienting.

If Jesus is a metaphor of God, in a similar way and for similar reasons, scripture is equally the parable of the word and ways of God. In that sense the Bible "is and is not". This is perhaps easier to consider because it was written by men and women, and for that reason and because it is metaphor it cannot be absolute, "divinely inspired", or final. Scripture then is the object of our interpretation and the finality of that activity is the development of concepts. The images presented directly or in metaphors and parables when linked to concepts, the fruit of reflection on these images, result in models, religious models.[141] The interpretive process is not random, we cannot say that one interpretation is as good as another. Because the text being interpreted is not just any text, we can speak of "interpreting with some degree of accuracy" in effect the "prejudices of both the speaker and the hearer" must be accounted for in the interpretation.[142] Thus, Jesus lived in a specific time, lived in a specific culture, he spoke in a particular language and lived within

---

[138] *Metaphorical theology* 49
[139] *Metaphorical theology* 50
[140] *Metaphorical theology* 51
[141] *Metaphorical theology* 54
[142] *Metaphorical theology* 56

a specific religious culture. His story was recorded and reflected on by a number of men and women who lived in a similar time and place, and for the most part in a different language. The point here is that "if the Bible is understood as a poetic classic or classic model, its metaphorical characteristics mean that tension, dialectic, openness, change, growth and relativity must be intrinsic to a proper understanding of its authority."[143] McFague concludes her reflections on metaphor, parable and scripture with the aphorism "to be a believer is to be on a continuum with being human." [144] It is our nature to interpret and our responsibility to make judgements between similarities and differences, in other words to think metaphorically.

It is for this reason that she attaches great importance to the development and use of models. Models provide a continuum between metaphors and parables and concepts by which we can understand; "unfortunately too little attention has been paid to models in theology and as a result that continuum has not been sustained."[145] As a result, "because models have been "silent" in theology they can be temptation to idolatry" and because they have been "highly resistant to change, they can be temptations to irrelevancy."[146]

Models are an essential progression in McFague's theology. She describes a good model as both concrete and detailed and sufficiently different from its principal subject to spark insight. In other words it has "specificity and distance" in order to be effective.[147] Models are common place in the human and natural sciences. One cannot imagine sociological or anthropological thought without the frame work of models. This is equally true in the sciences. Furthermore, the more complex the sociological, anthropological or scientific phenomena, the greater the need for several models. "Models provide a way of talking about an unfamiliar area: they give intelligibility to the unintelligible. Models yield this

---

[143] *Metaphorical theology* 64
[144] *Metaphorical theology* 65
[145] *Metaphorical theology* 65
[146] *Metaphorical theology* 66
[147] *Metaphorical theology* 69

intelligibility in a structural or comprehensive manner." [148] She insists that no one model can ever be adequate.

She detects two major dangers with models. The first is that there is a loss of "tension between model and modeled". And so we become imprisoned by dogmatic, absolutistic, literalistic patterns of thought. The second is that we are or become unaware that we are living within a model; "that's the way things are".[149] Models however are not finalities, they are a means to progress in ones reflection. For this reason they are also known as working models or hypotheses, and in the more rigorous studies multiple working models are the rule. In time, these sets of models become a paradigm, a set of basic assumptions or commitments in a tradition which defines the issues considered, the methods used, the answers allowed. Such is the condition of Christian tradition which has endured throughout numerous crises and "revolutions", all of which have resulted in paradigm "shifts". The Christian tradition is the paradigm "identified [...] with the parables of Jesus and Jesus as parable of God."[150]

In summary then:

> "[T]the content of scientific models consists of process, structure, and relationships, and this is also, as we have seen in the parables and Jesus as parable of God, what is critical in Christianity. If it is true [...] that the heart of the Old Testament is the covenant between God and Israel - a structure or relationship of a particular kind emphasizing mutual commitment and trust - and, it is the case that the parabolic world of the kingdom of God is not a "place" but a way of being in the world characterized by a reversal of worldly expectations and a reorientation brought about by the unmerited graciousness of God to us, then models of the reality must focus on the relationships and processes involved."[151]

---

[148] *Metaphorical theology* 73
[149] *Metaphorical theology* 74
[150] *Metaphorical theology* 82
[151] *Metaphorical theology* 98

The relational dimension of the kingdom is of utmost importance because the dualisms with which we live as a consequence of modernity pose sever challenges to the relationship implied by the "unmerited graciousness of God to us".[152]

In the light of this, a model of God as father would be one way of interpreting the divine-human relationship. And models of "father" and "mother" would be of equal value in that they both fall within the basic structure of the divine-human relationship and would in fact complement each other. We are dependent on models in order to bridge the transition from metaphor to concepts, and the object of theology is infinitely complex; no one limited set of models can be sufficient.

Having analysed the role of metaphors and parables and the intrinsic importance of models it is important to recall the goal, thrust, and focus of McFague's metaphorical theology. The goal is to assess the way in which the foundational language of parables and Jesus as parable – with their characteristics of openness, tension, relativity, indirection and transformation – have been retained in the course of various translation languages comprising theology. Its thrust is to consider the relationships among metaphor, model and concept with a view to justifying dominant, founding models as true but not literal, and of discovering other appropriate models that for cultural, political and social reason have been suppressed. The focus is on models because they retain the tension at the heart of religious language and thus can order the images of a tradition.[153]

Models are crucial in theology for without them theological theory would result in empty definitions which relate terms logically but meaninglessly. Furthermore, because of the complexity of its subject - the divine-human relationship, theology has needed a multitude of diverse models to such an extent that "theological language is rife with them".[154] To suggest but a few in relation to Christology in the early Church: the Son of man, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Second Adam, Messiah.[155]

---

[152] *Metaphorical theology* 98
[153] *Metaphorical theology* 103
[154] *Metaphorical theology* 105
[155] *Metaphorical theology* 105

At the very beginning of the modeling process is the identification of the "root-metaphor" which is nothing less than the "the kingdom of God", which is "exemplified in Jesus' parables and in Jesus as parable of God. It describes a mode of being in the world as the free gift of God. [...] Jesus is inextricably linked with the new root-metaphor as both the proclaimer and the way to the kingdom."[156] It represents a new relationship or a new quality of relationship, in effect a new way of being in the world. Along with this new relationship is a new tension which should be evident in theological reflection which "takes place in creeds, liturgies, and ethics as well as systematic theology."[157] Because of its essential importance, the root-metaphor cannot be changed without regard to changing the religion: it is of such fundamental importance. Thus Jesus is the root-metaphor for the Christian religion and how we speak of Jesus, how we speak of relationship with respect to Jesus is crucial.

The principal way that we speak of our relationship with God is through the Creed. The Apostles' Creed is descriptive and principally relies on metaphors. In contrast, the Nicene Creed is notably conceptual and retains some of the metaphors of the former. For McFague the crucial question is whether the creedal language is open-ended, relative, tensive, iconoclastic, and indirect, or is it absolute, possessive, static, literalistic, and idolatrous. Her evaluation is that the verdict is mixed. Though it is mixed, both creeds rely heavily on models; "Father" and "Son" are only two examples. We can relate to Father and to Son as models, and furthermore the creeds are focused on the relationship between them. Thus both a modeling language as well as a metaphysical language are employed in order to render the relationships. However, the metaphorical characteristics of the parables, and thus the constituent characteristics of a metaphorical theology – "a relationship between God and humanity of a certain quality and tension of a certain kind should be maintained if continuity between the base within the parables and its interpretation is to be maintained."[158] However, the creedal language as a translation

---

[156] *Metaphorical theology* 109
[157] *Metaphorical theology* 109
[158] *Metaphorical theology* 114

language of the parables emphasises the paternal model and thus "undercuts" the content and the form of metaphorical theology. As McFague explains[159], the creeds stress our relationship with God based on grace and merit rather than on acceptance based on compassion. Thus there is a virtual contradiction which reveals that the paternal model is incapable of modeling this pattern. In contrast maternal models have the advantage in that they are more often associated with unmerited care. Her point here is that there is obvious need for the use of complementary and varied models. The paternal model as such is needed but its hegemony "undercuts the *form* of metaphorical theology" .[160] Because the language of the creeds looks like literal language, "[i]t appears to be a straight forward assertion defining the nature of God as father and Jesus Christ as son, as well as the relationship between them".[161] However, it is based on only one model and thus, "[t]he temptation to possess God in this language, [...] , is almost irresistible."[162]

The problem is that these are the height of metaphors, they cannot be definitions and yet they have become dominant with many attendant consequences. Inevitably, then, theological language is a mixture of metaphoric and conceptual languages and which are intrinsically interdependent. Theological reflection is based on the metaphorical expression of the experiences of God, thus their relationship is fundamentally symbiotic. Even in the conceptual expression, the tensive "is and is not" of the metaphor must be retained, and further, it must arise from within the metaphorical base. Finally, McFague brings this back to the originating experiences: "The overall goal of interpretation [using conceptual language] is *to return to the experience* which the primary [metaphorical] language expresses".[163] As she summarises: "[...] metaphor and concept work together to create both meaningful and appropriate language about God." [164] Here she is repeating her basic understanding of the purpose of theology, but she has now added the importance of models with respect to how that is accomplished: through models which focus on relationships, and on their appropriate expression of experiences: "The critical

---

[159] *Metaphorical theology* 115
[160] *Metaphorical theology* 114
[161] *Metaphorical theology* 115
[162] *Metaphorical theology* 115
[163] *Metaphorical theology* 121
[164] *Metaphorical theology* 119- 123

models of the great theologians [Paul, Augustine] – their root-metaphors – are not about God or about human beings, but are concerned with the relationship between them."[165] Thus their basic theological model is an amalgam of metaphors and concepts. And because of the incredible complexity of that relationship, many and varied models will be required to interpret its complexity and richness.

As stated above, the dominant model is a paternal one. However, as she writes "[i]f theology is to maintain continuity with its metaphorical base, the question must be asked whether that model or any model should be allowed such a status? Are not other models also necessary both to interpret aspects of the relationship that are screened out by this model?" [166] A metaphorical theology would encourage a variety of interpretive models in order to ensure the continuity with a relational, tensive parabolic base.

### 3.2.1 God the father: model or idol?

Before proceeding to propose her own models at the base of metaphorical theology, in her third essay, McFague asks the question whether God the Father is a model or an idol. However, to address this question she insists on two major criteria to ensure the internal consistency and comprehensiveness, appropriate for a metaphorical theology. The first is that they must be of a similar or complimentary type: "they must share characteristics which identify them as belonging to the same syndrome."[167] She considers that the models most frequently encountered in Western theology "are of a piece". They stress the central human experiences of healing, restoration, guidance, protection, and liberation. Thus the models of father, protector, healer, and saviour are well suited.

The second criterion is that the models must be able to cope with anomalies: are there dimensions of experience that the models cannot deal with? An example of an anomalous experience would be the Shoah, whose evil cannot be understood within traditional

---

[165] *Metaphorical theology* 126
[166] *Metaphorical theology* 128
[167] *Metaphorical theology* 139

models of evil. McFague suggests that coping with anomalies is perhaps the most serious criteria for assessing a system of models.[168] As an example of anomalies which have yet to be adequately addressed in tradition is the feminist critique, with its insistence that Christianity excludes the experience of women and images of women. But whatever the models adopted in metaphorical theology, they must avoid both idolatry on the basis of absolutes and irrelevancy by ensuring that the models "fit" the human "data" (experience). Clearly this latter, phrased analogously to a scientific process, is not feasible in the same way in attempting a theological "fit". If we consider the models of father, mother, liberator, friend, creator or redeemer the best that can be said is that, "given our experience of healing, of liberation, of renewal, they appear to be apt or appropriate to the most profound dimensions of human existence"[169], and no more.

The model of God the father can be evaluated on the basis of these two criteria. As McFague presents it, the feminist critique centers on the dominance of this one model to the virtual exclusion of others, such that it has become idolatrous for some, and that it fails to deal with the anomaly presented by those whose experience does not "fit" within this model, such that it has become irrelevant.[170]

Her analysis then begins with the contention "that the root-metaphor of Christianity is not God the father but the kingdom or rule of God, a relationship between the divine and the human that *no* model can encompass."[171] A metaphorical theology, that is, a theology based on the parables and Jesus as parable, insists on many models such that the tension at the heart of this theology is maintained. To assess whether the dominant model meets the two criteria, McFague relies on the feminist critique of patriarchy as presented in what she describes as revolutionary and reformer feminism.

---

[168] *Metaphorical theology* 140
[169] *Metaphorical theology* 143
[170] *Metaphorical theology* 146
[171] *Metaphorical theology* 146

There are two basic critiques of the model. The first is that the model has been expanded "to cover as much ground as possible"[172] with the dominant images of lord, judge, king, master in the Christian tradition. And secondly is the interactive character of the model, in which the model and the modeled mutually influence one another: "If God is male, male is God" quoting Mary Daly.[173] Revolutionary feminism sees no future in "remodeling" Christianity and that the main resource for feminist theology is women's experience. In effect this fundamental change in the paradigm represents a new religion. In contrast, reformer feminism chooses to rebalance the dominance of the 'God the father' model with a faithful renewed reading of the source of Christian theology. As McFague says: "the Bible as a whole, including the New Testament, does not clearly support the patriarchal model in the form in which it developed."[174] She asserts that feminist theologians in general are agreed that the model as developed and maintained can no longer be tolerated. The problem is that this dominant model pays scant notice of women's experience, it is as though women did not exist. However, she rejects the notion that women's experience is the major source for "naming" new religious metaphors and models. Thus while she is in a sense beholden to the revolutionary feminist search for new models, for a new discourse, she is doubtful that the models based solely on female experience can be made commensurate with the tradition. Nevertheless, they do provide genuine insights for the revision of the traditional paradigm, and these insights have to be studied. That experience is at the base of theology and religion, is not a new idea, and thus all experience must be recognised in the reformation of the dominant models based on the root-metaphor of the Kingdom of God. As she sees it "[...] the kingdom of God in the New Testament is not a fulfillment but a critique of the present, and as such is not a support for the status quo but a threat to it."[175] Hence reformer feminist theologians "believe that the root-metaphor is human liberation, not patriarchy, and that liberation for women can occur within the Christian paradigm."[176] For this reason, human bondage to the conventions and expectations of the ways of the world in contrast to the freedom of

---

[172] *Metaphorical theology* 146
[173] *Metaphorical theology* 147
[174] *Metaphorical theology* 151
[175] *Metaphorical theology* 161
[176] *Metaphorical theology* 165

life according to the ways of the kingdom of God must be addressed. She here identifies herself as a feminist reformer when she writes that this paradigm is the Gospel for all peoples, not just for women, not just for men, nor any other division of humanity.

What we are invited to do, is enter the kingdom of God which we do in a multiplicity of ways, in a multiplicity of experiences. It is obvious that no one model, no one metaphor can possibly express the infinity of the relationship between God and his creation. Without doubt Jesus referred to God as his father. However, "the growth [of the model] into patriarchalism, a system fostering male superiority at all levels of personal and public life, is a serious perversion of Jesus' understanding of the father model. Moreover, its exclusion of other models is restrictive of the plurality of ways people experience the liberating love of God, as well as idolatrous toward one model of what *no* model can ever capture."[177] Thus as a reformer, McFague considers it possible to find sources within the Christian paradigm for liberating religious models for all persons and groups who have felt excluded by the patriarchal model. This would be possible by focusing on the relationship between God and human beings rather than on descriptions of God.

The Old Testament includes feminine images of God, according to*p.* Trible, though not as many as male images; however, they seem to be completely absent in the New Testament.[178] The so called "Abba event" has been discussed at some length as a possible female image by Hamerton-Kelly.[179] However a more authoritative analysis by Schillebeeckx sees this as expressing Jesus' intimacy and identification with the God whose liberating mission was also his own.[180] So the model of God the father survives, but "what surfaces is an understanding of God as the 'One who is bent upon humanity'. One who wills the liberation of the abandoned and rejected."[181] This is clearly not the

---

[177] *Metaphorical theology* 167

[178] Trible, Phyllis, 1978, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 206p. discussed in *Metaphorical theology* 170

[179] Hamerton-Kelly, Robert, 1979, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus*. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 128p. 81 discussed in *Metaphorical theology* 170

[180] Schillebeeckx, Edward, 1981, *Jesus, an experiment in Christology*. Crossroad, 767p. 268 discussed in *Metaphorical theology* 171

[181] *Metaphorical theology* 172

father of a patriarchal model, but Jesus' obedience to a God whose reign was a reversal of expectations, not the mighty Messiah, but one who humbled himself "even unto death".

McFague's quest for a feminine model for expressing the divine human relationship is deemed essential because of the nature of that relationship which is "one which disorients conventional standards and expectations and reorients us to a new way of being in the world characterized by God's gracious love to all peoples."[182] Thus the feminine models are required so that both men and for women are able to express certain aspects of of the experience of that relationship. Without clear feminine metaphors there is the risk of losing essential dimensions of the relationship.[183]

## 3.3 MODELS OF GOD

At the end of her second essay, McFague identified the need for more than just parental models; they need to be "balanced by non-familial, non-gender-based ones". [184] Here she proposed God as friend, a metaphor which has much to offer. Indeed we are identified by Jesus as his friends: "The God of Jesus in the One who invites us to table to eat together as friends."[185] In her third essay, *Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age*, she revisits that proposal and puts it into a larger theological context and for the first time situates her theology within a timely context as the subtitle of the book suggests.[186] She has become increasingly worried that the dominant theological models are not only idolatrous and irrelevant but may also work against the continuation of life on our planet. She was profoundly upset by the real threat of nuclear conflict and in particular how this had been fostered by what she refers to the Judeo-Christian triumphalist imagery for the relationship between God and the world. "If a case can be made, as I believe it can, that traditional imperialistic imagery for God is opposed to life, its continuation and

---

[182] *Metaphorical theology* 172
[183] *Metaphorical theology* 177
[184] *Metaphorical theology* 178
[185] *Metaphorical theology* 181
[186] *Models of God*

fulfillment, then we must give serious attention to alternatives."[187] Her proposal in this third essay is to tread a line between a ghettoizing retreat by returning to anachronistic models and metaphors and a retreat from all models into sterile abstract language. She chooses instead to "experiment with the models of God as mother, lover and friend of the world and with the image of the world as God's body."[188]

Several things become immediately evident in this essay. The language of her critique has become more pointed, in a sense she is surer of what it is that is bothering her. And secondly she declares her theology not only metaphorical but also heuristic which implies that it is fundamentally experimental in its origins and in that way explicitly organic. This description sits well with her awareness for the need "to accept a new sensibility that is holistic and responsible, that is inclusive of all forms of life, and that acknowledges the interdependence of all life."[189] This new sensibility is in contrast to the prevailing one in which our imaginations and feelings have been under the guidance of a benevolent but absolute deity, a world populated by an *independent individual.* Finally, it is a continuation of her theology, which is to imagine the relationships between ourselves and our Creator and the whole of creation. "The holistic paradigm suggested in place of the atomistic paradigm has revolutionary consequences for Christian theology. "[T]o incorporate it into our imaginations, is a necessary dimension that is required of Christian theology in our time".[190] It must be remembered that this book was written in the early 1980s when for the first time in history, we had the power to extinguish ourselves and possibly all life. This thought becomes even more striking when she added to it that our extinction would also extinguish consciousness in God's creation.[191] McFague's basic understanding at the beginning of this essay is that "the evolutionary, ecological perspective insists that we are, in the most profound ways, "not our own": we belong, from the cells of our bodies to the finest creations of our minds, to the intricate,

---

[187] *Models of God* ix
[188] *Models of God* xi
[189] *Models of God* 3
[190] *Models of God* 5
[191] *Models of God* 7

constantly changing cosmos".[192] This does not refer only to life forms but equally to the whole cosmos as well. This is a necessary, countervailing understanding in that we function presently in an "atomistic, reductionist perspective that separates human beings from other beings and reduces all that is not human to objects for human use."[193] Her hope then is to imagine new models in which we see ourselves as "gardeners, caretakers, mother and fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends."[194] Her proposal is to deconstruct the dominant models with the attendant overtones of *power* and reconstruct the models by introducing new and renewed ones which will have the 'power of love' at their core. She proposes this because of what is perceived as our inability in this modern or post modern age to link God and the world. It results from a lack of an imaginative picture.[195] What is required then is to remythologize theology by means of a constructive and metaphorical theology. To arrive at this she presents two questions: first, what does a metaphorical theology say about the authority of Scripture, tradition and experience? Secondly, how does it interpret the "demonstrable continuities" with the Christian paradigm of our time?

Concerning the first question, McFague argues that all three elements are in fact the recording of experiences. The scriptures are "recordings" of experiences of God's relation to the world, and tradition is the recordings of reflections on the scriptures that are coupled with the authors' own experiences of God. As sources for a metaphorical theology, they provide a vast array of metaphors, models and insights. They suggest that one need have little fear in experimenting "to find grids and screens with which to interpret God's transforming love within the givens of [one's] own time."[196] The time she is addressing is an evolutionary, ecological vision of interdependence with human beings possessing the ability to end life. Hence it would not be appropriate to provide the Christian response "in the language of dying and rising gods, personal guilt and

---

[192] *Models of God* 8
[193] *Models of God* 8
[194] *Models of God* 13
[195] *Models of God* 31
[196] *Models of God* 44

sacrificial atonement, eternal life and so forth."[197] So what is Christian faith most basically about in terms that address these times? The answer is in the story of Jesus as illuminative and illustrative of the Christian understanding of the God-world relationship; the Word was made flesh. Her perspective is similar to that of liberation theologies which are opposed to oppression of some, to hierarchies and dualisms, to domination by the powerful. The characteristics of the Christian faith within her theology then are destabilizing conventional expectations or at least disorienting perspectives upsetting to typical divisions and dualisms. It is inclusive of the weak, the stranger, the outcast. It is non-hierarchical and non-triumphalist, epitomized by the king who becomes the servant and who suffers for and beside the oppressed.[198] These are fundamental threads in her theology, which together constitute the patch she is contributing to the quilt that is theology.

This is McFague's thesis, but as she asks, is it in continuity with the Christian paradigm or is it a substitution for it? To answer, she returns to the story of Jesus and his speaking in parables, his table fellowship with outcasts, and his death on a cross. She understands the parables as illuminating the destabilizing aspect of the good news of Christianity which is nothing less than the Kingdom of God. The table fellowship testifies to inclusiveness, and the death of Jesus reveals its non-hierarchical emphasis. While the disorienting and destabilizing dimensions of the parables have been discussed earlier, Jesus' eating and drinking with anybody and everybody are as McFague suggests "enacted parables".[199] Jesus is purposefully reaching out to the impure, the outcasts, the marginalized, the invisible; Jesus "epitomizes the scandal of inclusiveness for his time."[200]

McFague's interpretation of the cross is that it "epitomizes the retribution that comes to those who give up controlling and triumphalist postures in order to relate to others in

---

[197] *Models of God* 45
[198] *Models of God* 48
[199] *Models of God* 51
[200] *Models of God* 52

mutual love."[201] This radical identification with all others is in contrast to "fiercely defended hierarchies and dualisms".[202] Jesus' death is ambiguous: some see it as the critique of triumphalism (the king become servant) and others as a prelude to the resurrection. The first is consistent with the inclusive, destabilizing and non-hierarchical tenor of the parables and accounts of Jesus at table. The second is conventional, exclusive and triumphalist and if so it is a perversion of the gospel.[203]

> If we see Jesus as "fully God and fully man", the subsitiutionary sacrifice, who atoned for the sins of the world two thousand years ago and who now reigns triumphant along with all who loyally accept a salvation we do not need but weaken if not destroy our ability to understand and accept the salvation we do need.[204]

McFague argues that such an act by one person in whom others could participate made sense in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, but not any longer. "Both the individualism and the remoteness of this view are contrary to the idea that salvation in our time must be the task of all human beings working in concert with the loving power of God as a present and future activity."[205] What is critical in this view is what we, with God, do now. In the conventional model we are encouraged to think of God in triumphalist, royalist, highly individualistic and very distant images. In contrast, if we see the cross as God's way of being in and with the world, then very different images of God emerge accompanied by very different ways to speak to God. "If Jesus of Nazareth as paradigmatic of God is not just a "phase" of God but is genuinely revelatory of God, the mode of the cross, the way of radical identification with all, which will inevitably bring punishment, sometimes to the point of death, becomes a permanent reality."[206] It becomes a destabilizing, inclusive, non-hierarchical vision.

It is important to distinguish between the critique of the creedal account of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension and its obvious image of a triumphal and distant God, and the appearance of Jesus to so many following his death: or more briefly between the empty

---

[201] *Models of God* 53
[202] *Models of God* 53
[203] *Models of God* 54
[204] *Models of God* 54
[205] *Models of God* 54
[206] *Models of God* 55

tomb and his continuing presence and empowerment. According to McFague, "the resurrection is a way of speaking about an awareness that the presence of God in Jesus is a permanent presence in our present."[207] The appearance stories capture this awareness better than do the empty-tomb narratives with the associated bodily resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to glory. And the question goes begging, where is God the rest of the time; such a reading as 'the empty tomb and the ascension to sit at the right hand of the father"[208] does not lead to a permanent presence.

If God is permanently present to us, how is this accomplished, what form does it take? McFague's suggestion is to propose the "metaphor of the universe as God's "body", God's palpable presence in all space and time."[209] This is not an unmediated divine presence, it is a way of imagining it; there is no way of getting behind/around the metaphor. With this metaphor McFague is attempting to remythologize the Gospel for our time. If indeed we can imagine the universe as God's body, as self expressive of God, if it is a 'sacrament', then how would God respond to it and how should we?[210] For the purpose of models and metaphors is not simply to conceptualise theologically, but ultimately the purpose of theology is to assist us in responding responsibly, knowingly, insightfully to God's call. As she states: "If metaphors matter, then one must take them seriously at the level at which they function, that is at the level of the imaginative picture of God and the world they project." [211] If the world can be seen as the 'body' of God, if it is a 'sacrament', it is not then just a book; the Scriptures, that is, are special as the medium of divine presence, but the world is also God's dwelling place.

McFague addresses a further important question with respect to her proposal which is whether or not the metaphor of the world as God's body is pantheistic. Her answer is direct. It would be if there were no other "personal agential metaphors", for the body would be all there was. "Nonetheless the model is monist and perhaps more precisely

---

[207] *Models of God* 59 At this point in the development of her theology it is notable that she does not refer to the "presence of God in Jesus" as the Holy Spirit. This will be discussed later.
[208] *Models of God* 60
[209] *Models of God* 60
[210] *Models of God* 61
[211] *Models of God* 67

designated as panentheistic. This is a view of the God-world relationship in which all things have their origins in God and nothing exists outside God, though this does not mean that God is reduced to these things."[212] God is in all things but is not all things.

As part of her contention for the metaphor of the cosmos as God's Body, McFague insisted on the need for personal agential metaphors. She proposes three, God as mother, lover, and friend. But why these and why personal metaphors? To the first question, it is because while the partriarchal, monarachical and triumphalist metaphors are essentially concerned with how we govern our lives, these personal metaphors go to a deeper level of how we live at all and how well we live. Her answer to the second question is that "if we speak of God in personal metaphors, we will not be speaking of a being that is related externally to the world, [...] but we will be conceiving of God on the model of the most complex part of the whole that is the universe – that is, on the model of ourselves."[213] She is not reducing God to us, but reminding us that we are created in *imago dei.* We have come to the times when from now on it is we who must act in our world, not only a benevolent God. These metaphors address these times most directly. "To say that God is present in the world as mother, lover and friend of the last and least in all creation is to characterize the Christian gospel as radical, surprising love."[214] This love is creative, salvific and sustaining. Creative love is represented by the parental (father, mother) metaphor, salvific love by the son, our lover, and sustaining love by the spirit, friend. In sum, "these models suggest that the crucial divine activity is the creation of a world, which is loved passionately to the limit of God's very being."[215] It is not clear whether McFague has knowingly set about to present what can be construed as the Trinity which is sketched in **Table 1**. The parallelism is remarkable.

---

[212] *Models of God* 72
[213] *Models of God* 82
[214] *Models of God* 91
[215] *Models of God* 93

**Table 1.** Parallelism between the Trinity and the three loves as proposed by McFague.

| **Trinity** | Father-Mother | Son | Spirit |
|---|---|---|---|
| **McFague's three loves** | creative | salvific | sustaining |
| **Roles** | parent | lover | friend |
| **Type of love** | agape | eros | philia |

### 3.3.1 God as mother

Why introduce the metaphor of mother? Because in the beginning God created man and woman, not just man was created in the image of God. The problem, of course, boils down to female sexuality, forgetting, as well, that father elicits male sexuality. Indeed there is no gender neutral language "if we take ourselves as the model for talk about God."[216] Nevertheless father and mother complement each other, but this is not to identify stereotypical images of either. McFague repeats that if we use only the male pronouns we fall into idolatry. Furthermore, "[i]f we are to be concrete, personal, and non-idolatrous in our talk about God, we have no alternative but to speak of God in female as well as male terms, [...]and that we are not attributing passive or nurturing, any more than active or powerful qualities to God."[217] Indeed we would only be attributing human qualities. McFague is proposing 'God as mother' to bring symmetry to the metaphor 'God as father'.

The model of God as mother addresses God's love for us as Agape, God's creating and God's justice. God as mother calls us back and wants to be reunited with us, thus her love is not totally disinterested. In some sense we are valuable, desirable and needed. As she could have said at our becoming: "It is good that you exist!"[218] Quoting Tillich, McFague writes that this love is the "moving power of life" and as that "which drives everything that is towards everything else that is".[219] We can see here, how this metaphor as Agape

---

[216] *Models of God* 98
[217] *Models of God* 99
[218] *Models of God* 102
[219] *Models of God* 102

meets the requirements for us to look out into our world, which we are threatening with nuclear holocaust, with an urge to become one with it. God as the mother of the universe is interested in all forms of life; necessarily she is also concerned with all that is needed to sustain those myriad species of life. Thus we cannot focus only on that which is living; we have also to focus on the whole of our world.

The versions of creation in Genesis include two important beliefs: that God created *ex nihilo*, from nothing, and hierarchically, that is the physical subordinated to the spiritual. These views have us created "out of what is totally different from God and in a manner that places humanity above nature".[220] In contrast, God as mother would create not as an intellectual or aesthetic act but as a physical act; the universe would be bodied forth from God as an expression of God's very being – *imago dei.*[221] What McFague is suggesting here is that the birth metaphor is both closer to Christian faith and better for our world than the dominant picture. It implies that the universe and God are neither totally distant nor totally different, "it is and it isn't". It also implies the overturning of "the dualism of body and mind, flesh and spirit, nature and humanity."[222] God is not spirit over against a universe of matter. This last idea brings home again the insufficiency of the metaphors with which we have become familiar.

I end this subsection with this extended quote:

> The universe, from God's being, is properly body (as well as spirit), because in some sense God is physical (as well as beyond the physical). This shocking idea – that God is physical – is one of the most important implications of the model of creation by God the mother. It is an explicit rejection of Christianity's long, oppressive, and dangerous alliance with spirit against body, an alliance out of step with a holistic, evolutionary sensibility as well as with Christianity's Hebraic background.[223]

---

[220] *Models of God* 109
[221] *Models of God* 110
[222] *Models of God* 111
[223] *Models of God* 112

### 3.3.2 God as lover

The metaphor of God as lover is obvious if we consider that "God so loved the world". If this is so, then God is our lover and the world is God's beloved. The dominant metaphor would suggest that God's love is totally giving with no thought of finding value in the beloved nor any response. And still we are loved passionately, as Jesus showed. He loved passionately and he died passionately. And yet for God to love passionately is thought to somehow contaminate it. Loving is the most intimate of all human relationships, it is what we are able to experience most profoundly. Love between humans is not an ordinary characteristic, just one more of our attributes, so it is somewhat anomalous that referring to God as lover is generally only common among mystics. In sum "[a]re we not saying that the most intimate and important kind of human love is inappropriate for expressing some aspects of the God-world relationship?"[224]

The metaphor refuses to remain hidden because it speaks of God's regard for us which is that we are found valuable and that from the moment of creation. We are loved simply because we are. But we were not alone in being considered good, it was also said of the whole of creation. Thus we are loved as part, the conscious part, of the cosmos. We are loved along with all of the cosmos. As a consequence, the metaphor of God as lover immediately has the largest of dimensions. It is not only inclusive of all human kind, not only of other living species but of the whole of creation.

In time we come to "value the valuer". We respond in kind, we 'fall in love' with the lover. This seeking of us on God's part, this seeking God on our part is Eros. McFague describes this "love as the desire for union with the valuable" or as the "drive towards the unity of the separated.", quoting Tillich.[225] As she continues: "In a time such as ours, when the intrinsic value of our world must be stressed, eros as the love of the valuable is a necessary aspect of both divine and human love."[226] It is fundamental because the work

---

[224] *Models of God* 126

[225] Tillich, Paul, 1954, *Love, power, and justice: ontological analyses and ethical applications*. New York, Oxford University Press. 30-31 *quoted* in *Models of God* 130 endnote 8

[226] *Models of God* 130

of God as lover, in the making whole or uniting with what is attractive and valuable, is salvation, rather than the rescuing of what is sinful and worthless.

If eros *is the desire for union with the world*, it suggests that it lacks what it would have. The description of this love as Eros "implies that the world is valuable, that God needs it, and that salvation is the reunification of the beloved world with its lover, God."[227] Why would God reach out to God's world if God did not value it, if God did not need it? We know that we are loved, we alone can consciously respond and return that love. This dynamic underlines the need that God expresses for us, such that God "came to dwell among us". But why?

The model of God the creator as mother "suggests an ontological sacramentalism: the world is born from the being of God and hence will be like God. The model of God the saviour as lover suggests a personal sacramentalism: the world is in a responsive relationship to God."[228] In the first more basic sacramentalism, the whole world has the potential for reflecting God. The second sacramentalism suggests that humans as the *imago dei*, can be revelatory of the God-world relationship as the response of the beloved to the lover.

McFague says that the work as saviour by God as lover is to make good the separation between God and his creation due to sin. She does not define sin as acts against God, since what we do is rarely consciously against God. It is nearly always against our own species, against other species and against God's creation. "[I]t is the desire to be like God, with control over good and evil, life and death. It is operating against God."[229] If the ecological situation produces a generalized context in which human sin occurs, the nuclear threat is a still greater and more immediate context.[230] At this time the threat of nuclear annihilation is real. Thus sin is not pride or unbelief but the refusal of

---

[227] *Models of God* 131
[228] *Models of God* 135
[229] *Models of God* 138-39
[230] Twenty years later she will return to this and then see the ecological disaster facing the planet as paramount.

relationship, [...] "the refusal to be the beloved of our lover God and the refusal to be lover of all God loves."[231] As implied by the model, it is a refusal to be part of the body of God.

Along with sin, God as lover must also deal with suffering which is the result of sin, and along with the very complexity of the world which has been created. Suffering resulting from sin on massive scales in a sense can be understood, but what of suffering which is the result of natural physical and organic processes? Salvation is not something that was accomplished by one man and that occurred but once. The understanding of salvation in the model of God as lover differs from the model implicit in the substitutionary, sacrificial death of Christ. For McFague, it is the solidarity of the body of God which in different ways and at different times manifest God's love; in that sense, it is the sacramentalism of God's creation. "[I]t is the ongoing healing of the divided body of our world which we, with God, work at together."[232] This in no way obviates the paradigm of Jesus revealing God's love to the beloved, which are not only individual humans, but the world. "We participate then, in our own salvation."[233]

### 3.3.3 God as friend

Whereas God as mother is necessary for Agape, for creation, for justice, and God as lover for God's Eros, God's reaching out, saving work and healing, God as friend furnishes us with Philia, which is sustaining and provides us with companionship. Difficult as it is to define and as difficult to determine what it is, nevertheless one chooses one's friends. McFague proposes that "friendship at its most elemental is the bonding of two people by free choice in a reciprocal relationship."[234] We usually choose friends because they are people we like, quite naturally. It is a combination of respect and affection. This combination can be termed "Philia", a strong bonding that is relatively free of complications such as guilt, fear, jealousy and resentment, which can plague the other

---

[231] *Models of God* 139
[232] *Models of God* 143
[233] *Models of God* 145
[234] *Models of God* 162

loves. Thus, it has three 'paradoxical' aspects: bonding occurs freely, inclusiveness is implied in the relationship and it requires grown-up (mature) abilities even though children can make friends instinctively.[235]

One is completely free to make friends, indeed this freedom is required in order to create the trust which is at its roots, along with reliability, constancy and loyalty.[236] However it is not just delight in the other but also delight in a common vision which friends face side by side in contrast to "lovers who are absorbed in each other face to face".[237] Friendship is inevitably, if not intrinsically, inclusive because one has more than one friend and typically for the very same reasons, interests, visions.

But how does anybody, especially a child, bring adult qualities to a friendship? McFague's answer lies in the nature of friendship which includes mutuality and reciprocity for friendship to begin and grow. Thus even children are capable of interdependence.[238] With this McFague has established the basis on which we can become friends with our creator. "If God is the friend of the world, the one committed to it, who can be trusted never to betray it, who not only likes the world but has a vision for its well-being, then we as the special part of the body – the *imago dei* – are invited as friends of the Friend of the world to join in that vision and work for its fulfillment." [239] With this we are called by God but into a particular relationship in which there is a shared vision and in the centre of that 'friendship' there is inclusive friendship - Philia. This takes the form most typically of eating together, sharing a meal, not exclusively but inclusively among friends with a common vision. As a partial summary, McFague writes: "God as mother says, 'it is good you exist!'; God as lover says, 'You are valuable beyond all imagining'; God as friend says 'Let us, all of us, break bread together in fellowship and joy.'"[240] She adds that it is God's Agape that creates all the different life forms and

---

[235] *Models of God* 162
[236] *Models of God* 162
[237] Lewis, C.S., 1960, *The four loves*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 156p. 103 quoted in *Models of God* 163
[238] *Models of God* 165
[239] *Models of God* 165 "Well-being" can be understood as that which God wills.
[240] *Models of God* 168

establishes their right to be. God's salvific Eros stresses the value of these forms and that they be free and whole. And finally with God's sustaining Philia there is the joy of all forms of life as companions and the source of new life.

At this point McFague faces a problem. "The church has chosen the model of Spirit to designate who the sustaining God is, but I would like to suggest that the model of friend or companion is preferable in an ecological, nuclear age."[241] Her problem is that firstly, Spirit appears as amorphous, vague, and colorless. It is the weak member of the Trinity in terms of image despite 'Ghost' having been replaced by 'Spirit'. Secondly, Spirit as an image of God's immanence, has been largely limited to divine activity in relation to human beings, to the effective exclusion of the vast remainder of the world from God's sustaining love. And finally, it tends towards what McFague describes as an individualistic, existentialist understanding of Christianity.[242] This is a somewhat surprising reasoning because as she discusses further, she places God's sustaining love in the context of Pentecost. In other words Jesus dies on the cross and that this is followed by his appearances to his disciples, which are a means for them to begin anew to understand what Jesus had been saying and doing: revealing his Father. But what is Pentecost if not the accomplishment of the God's promise to send Jesus' spirit to be with us always? Nevertheless the critique of the teaching concerning the apparent limitation of this sustaining Philia to individuals of the human species remains valid. It is only in recent times that the Church has called us to our responsibilities to the whole of our world.

McFague ends this essay with two central thoughts. "The world is our meeting place with God, and this means that God's immanence will be "universal and God's transcendence will be 'worldly'." And she continues: "This demands a new form of meditation in which we call up concrete images and dwell upon their specialness, their distinctiveness, their value, [...]until the pain of contemplating their permanent loss, [...]becomes unbearable.

---

[241] *Models of God* 169

[242] Though presented in objective terms, I wondered if McFague had a personal problem with Spirit. When asked about this 'lacuna', McFague answered most warmly and forthrightly that she had got that wrong. This becomes evident in her later essays. Personal communication November 2009

This is a form of prayer for the world as the body of God which we, as mothers and fathers, lovers, and friends of the world, are summoned to practice. [...] [Because] as the body of God, it is wondrously, awesomely, divinely mysterious."[243]

## 3.4 THE BODY OF GOD

The purpose of her fourth book, *The Body of God: an ecological theology*, is to use the lens of the universe as God's body in order to provide a way of imagining God's transcendence in an immanental way. The model of the body of God is essentially an organic model which has to be recaptured. "It focuses on embodiment, inviting us to do something that Christians have seldom done: think about God and bodies."[244] McFague uses scientific models of the universe, of the origin of the universe and our world and how it became populated. It is not about the rapprochement of science and theology. However, it uses models in science that provide contemporary views of the physical and biological reality, as spring boards for providing plausible theological responses to the organic evolutionary science models. To that extent she has continued to locate her metaphorical theology within the context of this world, this universe. In later essays the contexts will become more specific. At this point McFague is seeking a "loose fit" between the postmodern models of cosmology and the organic evolutionary model.

She is distinctly angry in her introduction to this essay.[245] Having been particularly sensitive to the real possibility of nuclear war in the mid-1980s, she has come to appreciate the almost inconceivable complexity of the ecological crises that became evident to her in the early 1990s. She sees the impact of this state of the environment as falling oppressively on the shoulders of those least powerful, the poor and in large measure women. Thus: "My theological and spiritual journey has led me [...]to the realisation that while all oppressions are different, [...]oppressions are also

---

[243] *Models of God* 186-87
[244] *The body of God* vii
[245] *The body of God* 5

interconnected, as the nature/woman oppression amply illustrates."[246] As "a Christian, feminist, ecological theologian" she is particularly aware of her own involvement in this oppression as she understands it. "Christianity is the religion of incarnation *par excellence* [the Word made flesh, Christ was fully human, this is my body and blood, the resurrection of the body, the church--the body of Christ who is its head]. Yet the earliest Christian texts and doctrines contain the seeds that, throughout history, have germinated into full-blown distrust of the body as well as deprecation of nature and abhorrence and loathing of female bodies."[247]

Using the model of body in order to interpret everything, from the subatomic particles to the universe itself, is perhaps ambitious, because we are really only familiar with 'macro' bodies. Nevertheless, we use the term in reference to many things in an impressive range of scales. However, despite this there is a profound contradiction about who we are. "The ambivalence and at times abhorrence that we see in Christianity [outlined above], feminism [it reinforces stereotypes] and ecology [holistic and atomistic causations] in regard to the body indicates a deep sickness in our culture: self-hatred."[248] We live with the strange illusion that we are other than our bodies. To counter this sickness and many of its attendant implications, McFague proposes that "with Christianity we accepted the claim that the Word is made flesh and dwells with us; with feminism, that the natural world is in some sense sacred; with ecology, that the planet is a living organism that is our home and source of nurture, [...] and [that] we dared to think of our planet and indeed the entire universe as the body of God."[249] This is not to describe God as having a body or being embodied, but that the 'matter' of the universe be applied to God as well. This is the possibility that she raises and the principal advantage of this model is that we are able "to think of God as immanent in our world while retaining, indeed, magnifying God's transcendence."[250] So when one imagines transcendence, one only has to turn to the picture of the cosmos. "Immanental transcendence or transcendent immanence is what

---

[246] *The body of God* 14
[247] *The body of God* 14
[248] *The body of God* 16
[249] *The body of God* 19
[250] *The body of God* 20

the model of the universe as God's body implies, and it is [...] what Christian incarnationalism implies as well."[251]

### 3.4.1 The classical organic model and the classic cosmological story

The classical organic model is expressed in the phrase "the church as the body of Christ."[252] Presumably this is true in the sense that the Church embodies Christ. In postmodern science, both the physical and biological sciences, the universe is perceived as a whole, all things, living and non-living are interrelated and interdependent. For example, heat in the earth's core and mantle is the ultimate driving force of an earthquake. Thus the idea of the model has been present for at least two millennia: one has to believe that every farmer has understood intuitively such intrinsic interrelations. But with the integration of dualisms beginning with the adoption of Greek philosophy and through the Enlightenment, we have been progressively separated into two modes one mental, spiritual, other-worldly and the other, material and mechanistic. Such that, today we live in the machine model rather than the organic model, without realising it, just as "fishes live in the sea[...]; this is the way things are."[253] Our lack of awareness is so pervasive that even the environment can be fixed given the right technology.[254] What we have lost, according to McFague, is the sense of belonging and of living in our world as our natural milieu. "[W]e can never return to the naïveté of Organic living that permeated lives" in the past, but which began to be eroded when we began to know that 'we think therefore we are'. This was the watershed.

This problematic has two critical issues within Christianity. Firstly, the Organic model as "the church as the body of Christ" in the early Christian church basically provided a sense of divine immanence in the entire organic natural world without distinction. However, the model was spiritualized, "excluding not only all of nature and most human

---

[251] *The body of God* 21
[252] *The body of God* 30
[253] *The body of God* 34
[254] *The body of God* 34

beings but also the physical aspects of life, including sex and, therefore, women."[255] This rendered the model dualistic with a hierarchical notion of exclusion, separating spirit from nature, human beings from other creatures and the earth, the head (rational) from the body (physical). "In the Christian version of the Organic model, the divine is not present in the whole of creation or even in the whole of the human being, but is located in and limited to the rational/spiritual part of the human, the head."[256] McFague understands its use by Christianity as a symbol of the spiritual life while discarding it as where we belong or where God can be found. "What it neglects [in its spiritualized version of the Organic model] is the rich, diverse, physical plenitude of creation – in other words just about everything."[257] It is thus her urgent desire to somehow recapture the inclusiveness of the Organic model.

The second critical issue is that it is assumed that the body was a human and implicitly male body. She argues that this imposes sever limitations on the understanding of the freedom of individuals; "The head tells the members of the body what they must do to insure the smooth functioning of the whole."[258] It also imposes sever limitations on the forms of association. Notwithstanding that it is a natural model, it has functioned primarily as a political one, largely restricted to relationships among human beings.

In order to break out of this 'dead end', McFague suggests[259] that the limitation to one male body be opened up to *bodies*, that is "matter in all its millions if not billions of forms", and to change the focus on one ideal, human body which revealed *sameness* to a focus on *bodies* which would reveal *difference*. To accomplish this transformation she engages the common creation story (CCS) as the appropriate asset.

Put simply the common creation story (CCS) radicalizes both oneness and difference. "From one infinitely hot, infinitely condensed bit of matter some 15 billion years ago,

---

[255] *The body of God* 35
[256] *The body of God* 35
[257] *The body of God* 36
[258] *The body of God* 36
[259] *The body of God* 37

have evolved one hundred billion galaxies, each with its billions of stars and planets. [F]rom such unimaginable unity has evolved such unimaginable diversity."[260] Her desire is to reimage the organic model and as it were recapture the 'naïveté' of the relation between God and the world as expressed in the organic model and with this render it commensurate with an ecological context.[261] An ecological context is defined by immense diversity and fundamental interrelationship and interdependence. The cosmology expressed in the CCS is an explanation of the immense diversity and the functional interrelationships and interdependencies that we see in our world and in the universe. But furthermore we now have the classic cosmological model that is commensurate with biological and microbiological theories of evolution. They are not only going in the same direction, they are, more accurately, different manifestations of the same reality: how creation moves on in time and space whether at the sub-atomic scale or at the cosmic scale.

McFague's "concern here is with the possibility of a theology of nature, that is, using the picture of reality coming to us from postmodern science as a way to reimage the relation between God and the world."[262] This picture is a radical departure from the prevalent cosmology of the previous two millennia.

### 3.4.2 A theology of nature

As stated above, the theology of nature is the main focus of this fourth essay. It uses contemporary science as a picture of reality in order to reconstruct and express faith rather than as the basis of or to confirm faith. Thus it does not attempt to reconcile science with beliefs. And because of the profound differences in the CCS in comparison with the former cosmology, we must expect perhaps a very different way of speaking of the relationship between God and the world. In as much as this is the purpose of the essay, it must be acknowledged that both the theologian and the scientist come from their

---

[260] *The body of God* 38
[261] *The body of God* 39
[262] *The body of God* 46

own horizons, as McFague specifies they are both embodied, physically, socially, culturally. Thus while the scientist rightly uses neutral criteria in order to be objective in research, the use of or interpretation of those results becomes eminently subjective and conditioned by the prevailing and/or dominant social and cultural realities. In a similar way, the theologian rarely steps out of his or her time while speaking of the relationship between God and the world. This last phrase, 'God and the world' in itself, points to the necessity of understanding the world, and also points to the imperative need for a sustained conversation with science. This is not to co-opt science to a theological position but to use the models, paradigms and resultant metaphors of science while writing theology. The point, and the difficulty, is that most scientists do not see purpose in the CCS except through the lens of a faith if they have one. Therefore it would be quite inappropriate to misuse or misinterpret scientific results. In that sense, theologians must aim for coherence and compatibility between the scientific view and the interpretation of basic doctrines.[263] The compatibility to be sought is "with the picture of reality broadly embraced in our time, rather than with technical scientific issues."[264]

One of the crucial problems with this conversation in our time, is that many theologians repudiate the compatibility of a personal God with the postmodern view of reality. True to her colours McFague states: "I believe not only that the personal model is one of the central continuities of the Western religious tradition, the loss of which would signal a paradigm shift of such proportions as to end that religious tradition, but that it is possible to understand the personal model in a way that is compatible with (although not demanded by) contemporary science."[265] Her specific concern here is to know what this picture (CCS) of reality suggests to us about the relation of God and the world, and how we should act as a consequence. The challenge is now more focused because believers do see the hand of God in the magnificence of the world and the universe, as well as the traces of perversion, and seeming malevolence (e.g. the brutalities of natural selection). This is despite the evolutionary model of a branching bush, many branches of which end

---

[263] *The body of God* 76
[264] *The body of God* 77
[265] *The body of God* 77

in extinction. Thus what we have is "what happens happens in the details, at the local level[...]"[266] rather than the result of some over arching progression. It must not be forgotten that the CCS has not come to an end, that evolution will continue and *Homo sapiens sapiens* along with it. McFague takes one step further than this and affirms that "evolution in the present and future on our planet will be inextricably involved with human powers and decisions."[267] It is her view that the future of the planet has fallen into our hands. So instead of pessimism, McFague sees reason to declare that "it *is* a wonderful life (a diverse, rich, complex one) *and* that we have a part to play in its future."[268] We are faced with both an ethical and pragmatic responsibility, and an invitation. In her words this is "embodiment and praxis (versus disembodiment and theory)".[269]

Having established to some degree the CCS as a means for reimaging the organic model, McFague next examines our place in the scheme of things; the place of humans in the context of the CCS. She does this from the earth-up perspective rather than from the sky down. She analyses the story with a view to reformulating a postmodern theological anthropology.[270]

First is the realization that, despite sayings to the contrary, our species dwindles in importance, to say the least, in the face of the world which is in fact the universe. "This suggests, surely, that the whole show could not have been put on for our benefit; our anthropocentrism is somewhat sobered."[271] Secondly, the story is dynamic, it has a beginning, a middle and presumably an end, which is perhaps 5 billion years off. This is in sharp distinction to a Newtonian universe which is static, but which has been the basis of our cosmology until the early 20th century. Within the context of the CCS, God would be understood as a continuing creator, and, most importantly, that we have some part in that "as partners in creation if only as the self-conscious, reflexive part of the continuing

---

[266] *The body of God* 79
[267] *The body of God* 80
[268] *The body of God* 81
[269] *The body of God* 95
[270] *The body of God* 104
[271] *The body of God* 104

creation."[272] Thirdly, the CCS reveals radical interrelatedness and interdependence, which are essential elements in order to develop an ecological sensibility. Its organic character does not homogenize, but on the contrary its branching form results in thorough going individuation. Even within the same species each member is different. But this individuation does not remove our interrelatedness; we retain the elements produced in supernovae. Fourthly, the CCS is characterized by multiple levels of increasing complexity; from subatomic particles to the complexity of the human. But there is the caveat that while there is a vector from these particles to us, we remain fundamentally dependent on all that chain, "which undercuts any sense of absolute superiority. [...] The higher and more complex the level, the more vulnerable it is and dependent upon the levels that support it."[273] A sobering thought. Finally, the CCS is in the public domain: everyone has potential access to it and everyone is included in the story.

The resultant is that the CCS paints a very different picture of who we are. Until now it is human beings who have been the most important to God and, in parallel to this, our modern culture "elevates individualism, consumerism, and technology."[274] This is clearly unsupported in the present day, and continuing to live by those premises "would be living a lie, that is, living in a way not in keeping with reality as currently understood." Thus while on the basis of the CCS we are not the centre of things, we are nevertheless increasingly important because in as much as we have the power to destroy ourselves and most of living species. We also have the knowledge and the power to help the process of ongoing creation.[275] This analysis allows McFague a further important conclusion. "In the light of this story [CCS], the model of the human being seeking its own salvation, whether through spiritual or material means, is not only anachronistic to our current sense of reality but dangerous."[276]

---

[272] *The body of God* 105
[273] *The body of God* 106
[274] *The body of God* 107
[275] *The body of God* 108
[276] *The body of God* 109

It is dangerous for us and for our world but it is also the basis of sin; not only does the CCS "give us a functional cosmology but also a grounded or earthly notion of sin."[277] As she stresses, we are not sinners because we rebel against God, [...] "our particular failing is our unwillingness to stay in our place, to accept our proper limits so that other [...] species can also have needed space."[278] To the extent that we focus on our need to the exclusions of others and other species, we occupy or destroy their space and as a result severely limit if not prevent their survival. The 'lie' then is not just in relation to other humans but equally to other species.

The discussion this far has been to present the context in which the model of the world as God's body finds itself. Our present cosmology is evolutionary, dynamic, highly diversified and entirely interrelated. She proposes that "[t]he metaphor of the world as God's body knits together the awe we feel for the magnificent intricacy and splendour of all the diverse kinds of bodies *and* the pain we feel from the suffering human or animal body."[279] The implication is that God is physical; Moses was allowed to see God's back but not his face. Indeed this is metaphor, but then all this discussion is metaphor, it is how we speak. McFague is proposing a "new way of imagining and expressing divine transcendence and immanence".[280] Indeed the model radicalizes transcendence, "the creation, the outward being, of the One who is the source and breath of all existence".[281] God's transcendence is 'embodied' such that "the transcendence of God is not available to us except as embodied."[282] Symetrically, "[t]he world (universe) as God's body is also a radicalization of divine immanence, for God is not present to us in just one place (Jesus of Nazareth) but in and through all bodies, the bodies of the sun and moons, trees and rivers, animals, and people".[283] For McFague Jesus is not an enigma. On the contrary, he is a paradigm of the divine way of embodiment. She is inviting us to see the creator in the creation. In contrast to this, she quotes at length from the First Vatican Council in which

---

[277] *The body of God* 113
[278] *The body of God* 113
[279] *The body of God* 132
[280] *The body of God* 132
[281] *The body of God* 133
[282] *The body of God* 133
[283] *The body of God* 133

God "is to be declared really and essentially distinct from the world".[284] How, she wonders, is it possible to imagine God so described as having a genuine and significant relationship with anything outside the divine reality. The declaration notwithstanding, it is our tradition that God is the creator, that God admired creation and loved at least its human creature sufficiently that when they fell away, "God became one of them, suffering and dying to redeem them from their sins".[285] As she points out, these two images do not fit together: that God is transcendent only to our world and immanent only in one person. The model she is developing is that of a personal God and as such God's "agency is concerned not only with human beings but with all forms of life: God's spirit is the breath of life in all life-forms".[286] It also underscores God's involvement with the world in time, referred to as the agential model. God has acted with the 'chosen people' in time, especially human history. "God is related to the world and realizes the divine intentions and purposes in the world, in a way similar to how we use our bodies to carry out our purposes".[287] This is a means of internalizing divine action within cosmic processes as portrayed in physical and biological evolutionary processes. Can it be true to say that all of these processes and the awesome results cannot be simply "things that happened on the way"? Are they not "of theological importance" and as such revelations of God's radical transcendence and immanence?

Is such an agential and personal model compatible with the CCS, which for most scientists reveals no purpose and as a consequence a personal God would be incompatible? Her proposal is direct: "we are embodied agents, and is it not therefore natural and appropriate, as the outermost contemporary evolutionary phylum, to imagine our creator "in our image"?"[288] This is the crux of the combined agential-Organic model; the universe as God's body, a body enlivened and empowered by the divine spirit. Such a model of God includes us. "If the history of the universe and especially the evolutionary history of our planet makes it clear that we do belong here, and that evolution has

---

[284] *The body of God* 136
[285] *The body of God* 136
[286] *The body of God* 137 This represents a distinct development in her view of the Spirit, though she is not yet making it explicit.
[287] *The body of God* 139
[288] *The body of God* 142

resulted in self-conscious being, then does it not make sense to imagine the relationship between God and the world in a manner that is continuous with that evolutionary history?" [289] McFague's proposal is that "we think of God metaphorically as the spirit that is the breath, the life, of the universe, a universe that comes from God and could be seen as the body of God".[290] Both spirit and body are metaphors, neither describes God. She proposes spirit, as breath, life, rather than mind or heart or will so as to avoid dualisms implicit in 'mind over body'; "it undercuts anthropocentricism and promotes cosmocentricism."[291] The principal reason "for preferring spirit to alternative possibilities is that it underscores the connection between God and the world, and not primarily the Mind that orders, controls, and directs the universe, but as the Breath that is the source of its life and vitality."[292] This suggestion is commensurate with the CCS in that the story has nothing to say on the matter. And clearly it is consistent with Christian tradition in its creedal and theological languages. "The joining of the spirit that gives life to every creature with the Holy Spirit that renews all creation suggests a connection between Christian theology and the two forms of evolution – biological and biocultural."[293]

An important implication of this model is that "divine incarnation is not limited to redemption but is everywhere evident in the bodies that live through the breath of the Spirit."[294] The model focuses on empowerment rather than direction and in this connection all life is dependent upon God and that the Spirit is a sustaining breath not an intermittent intervention. However, when transferred to a Christian theology, McFague does not hesitate to use the same metaphors with respect to the Holy Spirit and goes so far as to invert or amplify her idea such that now the Holy Spirit is not simply empowerment of but also a direction for all that teeming life.[295]

---

[289] *The body of God* 143
[290] *The body of God* 144 "the dust of the universe enlivened by the breath of God"
[291] *The body of God* 144
[292] *The body of God* 145
[293] *The body of God* 147
[294] *The body of God* 148
[295] *The body of God* 148

Her presentation thus far raises fundamental questions concerning Christology which she understands as central in hers or any theology. Till now while asserting that Christ is the paradigm of God's incarnation, there is the implication that it is not limited to Jesus, that it is not limited to redemption, that creation is a sacrament of God. She is now very forthright: "In its traditional form [that Jesus alone is the "image of the invisible God"] the claim is not only offensive to the integrity of other religions, but incredible, indeed absurd, in light of postmodern cosmology. It is not remotely compatible with our current picture of the universe."[296] The critical point in her argument is that "The Word *became flesh* and *lived among us*". "God is embodied and embodied paradigmatically as one of us, a human being, that is critical."[297] She suggests that the concreteness of God's presence and likeness to us is at the core of what happened. "From the paradigmatic story of Jesus we will propose that the direction of creation is toward inclusive love for all, especially the oppressed, the outcast, the vulnerable."[298] Such a proposal is not suggested in the CCS nor in evolutionary history. This she describes as the shape of the model of God's body. The scope of that model is that the love she identifies is for all of creation; it is for the liberation, healing and fulfillment of all bodies. This represents a major shift in her approach. Up to this point she has based her ideas on science and anthropology in general. Now she is basing her thought on the story of Jesus Christ and relying in large measure on its understanding developed within the doctrine of the Trinity. "[I]ts greatest asset has probably been its value as a way to imagine divine transcendence and immanence in a unified manner."[299] McFague is proposing, in agreement with tradition, that transcendence is available to us, only immanently, only through the mundane, the physical, the bodily, but "one that is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth".[300] In effect her proposal is to consider Jesus as paradigmatic of what we find everywhere: everthing that is is the sacrament of God (the universe as God's body). Jesus, for Christians, is one of those bodies/places where God's presence erupted in a special way.[301] In her view, "[t]he distinctive characteristic of Christian embodiment is its focus on oppressed, vulnerable,

---

[296] *The body of God* 159
[297] *The body of God* 160
[298] *The body of God* 160
[299] *The body of God* 161
[300] *The body of God* 161 What she refers to as the "mystery and the mud"
[301] *The body of God* 162

suffering bodies, those who are in pain due to the indifference or greed of the more powerful."[302] With the threat to our ecology, such a focus should surely include the whole of our world. She suggests further that nature is the "new poor" and cannot be left out of God's love. God saw that creation was good; however, "valuing the natural bodies around us because they are intrinsically worthwhile in themselves [...], is conventionally alien to us."[303] Nevertheless, these are central to Jesus' ministry including his destabilizing parables, his ministry of healing of the sick and liberation of the possessed, and his practice of eating with all and mainly with outcasts.[304] Here of course she is returning to ideas and now evidence, which she developed in earlier essays. The model which emerges here is "that all are invited to the banquet of life."[305] Though typically spiritualized, these three dimensions of parables, healing and eating are embarrassingly bodily. The body of God must be fed and not just spiritually.

It is at this point that she must draw a line between the CCS and what the Christic paradigm offers. It is with respect to evolution. Evolution is quite indifferent to the consequences of the process. Evolutionary lines continue but in that process many of the bodies and many of the branches end abruptly; the unstated consequence is continued suffering during the millions of years. "At this point, I believe we have no choice but to admit that the radical inclusiveness that is at the heart of Christian faith, especially inclusion of the oppressed, is not compatible with evolution."[306] This will require identifying particular characteristics: one will entail resistance and specifically through the liberation of the oppressed and another will involve suffering with those who, nonetheless, suffer. In the first we can be involved to find ways to free suffering bodies and fulfill their needs. However in the second, the suffering of God, - and ourselves - with those who nonetheless suffer "is beyond our best efforts and seemingly beyond God's as well."[307] She stresses that this suffering is part of the CCS and that while God is helpless, God is with us in the consequences. "The God who is the breath of our breath is

---

[302] *The body of God* 164
[303] *The body of God* 167
[304] *The body of God* 167
[305] *The body of God* 169
[306] *The body of God* 173
[307] *The body of God* 173

closer to us than we are to ourselves; this God is in and with us no matter what happens."[308]

McFague concludes then that: "In both forms of Christian solidarity with the oppressed, the active and passive, liberation and suffering, the cross and resurrection of the Christic paradigm are central to an embodiment theology. The death of our natural, sinful preference for hierarchical dualisms that favor the wealthy, healthy, well-fed bodies is a necessary prerequisite in the embodiment ministry of Jesus." [309] It demands our death just as his practice of that ministry brought about his death.

I end the chapter on this note, not in depression but hopefully, because McFague has brought her theology virtually full circle. Having begun angrily at the oppression brought on us from the philosophers, the theologians, the religious and secular leaders, and ourselves, she has returned to earth, our world, the universe, creation. In doing so she has linked God most intimately with all of its mundaneness. But more than that, she has said that God is among us, that the Breath of God is in creation. And finally she has said that our invitation within this creation is fundamentally our responsibility as well.

In the next chapter, McFague deals with the filling out of her metaphoric theology in three specific contexts: how we should love nature, how we must act in that respect, and how we must respond to the wake-up call of our changing climate.

---

[308] *The body of God* 176
[309] *The body of God* 173

# CHAPTER 4

# CHAPTER 4: MCFAGUE'S METAPHORICAL THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT

McFague's final books pursue the development of her metaphorical theology in familiar and urgent contexts which are crucial in our times.[310] In effect she is drawing us ever inwards to the world we inhabit. Having proposed that the world is where we are, not as tourists waiting for our end time, if not the end times, she now proposes how we should live in this world. Her method is much the same. She describes what is going on in our world, in particular who is suffering, before analysing the causes. Her basic premise is that what we think is what we speak, which is what we do. So this step of putting her theology into the contexts of our times is of vital importance. Her theology does not simply remain a theology, and in effect, remain outside our religious practice. For McFague, religion is essentially *doing* what we *believe*.

## 4.1 HOW WE SHOULD LOVE NATURE

Her thesis in this book, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*, is characteristically direct: "Christian practice, loving God and neighbour as *subjects*, as worthy of our love in and for themselves, should be extended to nature."[311] While it is her thesis, it is equally a major challenge. What she is proposing is that we relate to all of nature, each individual body, in the same way that we are supposed to relate to God and our neighbour. Why? Because when God created the universe, God looked on it and saw that it was good (seven times). This is a 'God goodness' not just any goodness. We look on nature, and possibly our neighbour as well, as objects. We are the subject, others are objects. Her proposal is to simply change our present subject-object view to a subject-subjects perspective (note the plural). Despite this simple statement, it is no small task.

---

[310] *Super, Natural Christians*: How we should love nature, 1997; *Life abundant*: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril, 2001; *A New Climate for Theology*: God, the World and Global Warming, 2008

[311] *Super, Natural Christians* 1

What she is proposing is that we become "natural Christians", hence the title of her essay "Super, natural Christians. This begs the question, what are we now? or alternatively, how do we fit into the scheme of things?[312] The way we know reveals where we are: for the most part, the model we use almost without thinking "encourages utilitarian, dualistic, individualistic, hierarchical thinking." It is how we deal with others so often "in terms of hierarchical dualisms – male/female, straight/gay, white/colored, Westerners/Easterners."[313]

To address these questions she first analyses the possibilities of a Christian nature spirituality. The idea is to bring together the root elements of Christianity, the dominant faith of her audience, and advance a spirituality which will focus on creation (nature). Such a spirituality "is Christian reflective practice extended to the natural world."[314] Spirituality, though used in reference to many things, is in her view "developing the attention to, awareness of, knowledge about, the other so that one can respond to that other appropriately."[315] The key word is *attention*: it is paying attention to what is involved in becoming human, and that is nothing less than an attempt to grow in sensitivity to self, to other, to creation, and to God.[316] Spirituality in this context is a prelude and sustaining praxis for action. The spirituality must be grounded in Jesus Christ. In announcing the kingdom of God through his ministry of parables, of healing, and "eating practices", Jesus reached out to everyone but most evidently to the oppressed – the poor, the sick, the possessed, the unclean, the impure. [317] Now, there is a new "poor and oppressed" that is emerging and it is nature, as McFague has identified in earlier essays. Although Jesus never specifically mentioned nature/creation, nor did he mention women or slaves. It was St. Paul who taught doing away with those dualisms. We must

---

[312] *Super, Natural Christians* 6

[313] *Super, Natural Christians* 8 'Colored' is a term once widely used in the United States to describe black people and Native Americans. In contrast, in South Africa it refers to non-white and non-black métis. I am using it to indicate any one of colour other than white.

[314] *Super, Natural Christians* 9

[315] *Super, Natural Christians* 10 This idea of *attention* is central to the thinking and spiritual teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff 1985, Needleman 2009.

[316] *Super, Natural Christians* 10 quoting from "Working party Report on 'Spirituality'" (Dunblane: Scottish Churches House, 1977 3. This document is referred to by several authors (e.g. King 1992) but could not be retrieved.

[317] 12

move in the direction of a Christian nature spirituality because "commitment to the God of Jesus Christ demands it."[318] God is not just for humans, God is concerned, loves all of creation. Quoting Leonardo Boff, this spirituality must "be grounded in a social ecology, the ways that human social and economic systems interact with the natural ecosystem."[319]

By nature, McFague means "the totality of processes and powers that make up the universe", the definition proposed by Kaufman.[320] It encompasses everything one can imagine, including the transformation of nature manifested in art, literature, painting and social structures, which in their way represent the evolution of humans and which she recalls is a natural process. Unfortunately however, though "while we and everything we think and do comes from nature, [...][they] are distinctly human, that is both distanced and particular."[321] This is evident in the ways that we interpret nature, we reflect on nature, we use nature; we see ourselves apart from it and this because of our self-consciousness. Indeed, even our bodies are included in this same distancing; despite our living within our bodies, we most typically see them as objects rather than integral parts of who we are.

The Medieval model succeeded in "integrating God, humans and the world, with nature as symbolic *of* God and hence seen as a way *to* God."[322] It was a coherent world-view. However, with the coming of the Enlightenment, it was displaced by the Newtonian vision of nature as mere matter, dead and inert; functioning essentially like a machine, where individualism replaced relationship and God was far removed. Quoting Martin Buber: "In the beginning is relationship." McFague insists that this is the postmodern picture of nature: that "neither God nor humans are distant from the natural world."[323] As she explains, this is the image that needs to become commonplace, "because the

---

[318] *Super, Natural Christians* 12-15
[319] *Super, Natural Christians* 13 This idea will form the basis of her next essay McFague 2001 - *Life abundant.*
[320] *Super, Natural Christians* 16
[321] *Super, Natural Christians* 17
[322] *Super, Natural Christians* 21
[323] *Super, Natural Christians* 21

evolutionary, ecological, relational, community model of nature is *the contemporary picture of reality.*"[324] The earlier models (Medieval and Newtonian) are outmoded, anachronistic and incredible. We are inheritors of one or a mixture of these models and this not withstanding that the cosmology on which they are based bears no relation to our understanding of reality.

The answer to her question of how a Christian should love nature is utterly direct; we must pay attention – detailed, concrete attention. We must do this "because we cannot know what we do not know." [325] However, McFague is rather specific in the manner of our paying attention; it can be with either the "arrogant eye" or the "loving eye".[326] But whichever it is we cannot come to nature with an "innocent eye"; we are not a blank page, we each come with our social, cultural and religious identity. This is the equivalent of the scientist who will generally use an objective approach in doing research, but will inevitably be subjective in interpreting the results into a larger context. The scientist will always use some specific model. The arrogant eye simplifies much as a scientist would, but unlike a research activity, it is "in order to control, denying complexity and mystery, since it cannot control it cannot understand."[327] Our approach to all other life forms and virtually all natural resources has been solely for our benefit.

The loving eye is not simply the opposite of the arrogant eye. "It suggests something novel in Western ways of knowing: acknowledgment of and respect for the other as *subject.*"[328] The loving eye requires more effort on our part because "it means that the route to knowledge is slow, open, full of surprises, interactive and reciprocal, as well as attentive to detail and difference." As she says the pure mind's eye becomes the messy body's eye as a result of the integration of taste, touch, and smell. Knowledge, according to McFague, has been associated almost exclusively with sight, and since Plato, sight is

---

[324] *Super, Natural Christians* 21
[325] *Super, Natural Christians* 29
[326] *Super, Natural Christians* 32
[327] *Super, Natural Christians* 33
[328] *Super, Natural Christians* 34

associated with mind, it transcends the earth; it is a removal from the messiness of creation.[329]

Thus the preferred model in line with the loving eye is the Subject-Subjects Model; that we pattern our knowledge on this model "and more specifically on friendship".[330] This has been called an "ecological model of knowing because it assumes that we always know in relationship."[331] Not as solitaries "who choose to be with others" but because "we are with others from before our birth until after our death."[332] As well as not being simply the inverse of the subject-object model, the thing of importance is that "what I know is *many* subjects" that is subject-subjects.[333] Finally the model underlines difference, it is not a matter of loving just one species but millions of species as well as the 'inanimate' material and structures of the universe. The subject-subjects model also points to what McFague calls an environmental ethic of care, which is based on a model of subjects in relationship. This is not limited only to relationships between humans; such an attitude engenders appropriate attention towards the world in all its parts.[334]

But is all of this Christian, McFague asks; is this a Christian option? To answer this in part, she turns to look at the "successful functional, medieval cosmology" in comparison with that issuing from the Enlightenment, and the subject-subjects model of today.[335] It is her contention that through to the Enlightenment, nature was seen as alive: "it was a subject with a being and purpose independent of human usefulness." [336] It was not merely a natural resource for our gain, however, it was a dualistic, hierarchical, static and deterministic view of the world. It was a world of the Great Chain of Being with transcendent God at the top. Quoting Hildegard of Bingen who saw the "sandy globe" set at the centre of creation to signify the centrality of humans in creation: "This openly

---

[329] *Super, Natural Christians* 35
[330] *Super, Natural Christians* 36
[331] *Super, Natural Christians* 37
[332] *Super, Natural Christians* 37
[333] *Super, Natural Christians* 39
[334] *Super, Natural Christians* 41
[335] *Super, Natural Christians* 45
[336] *Super, Natural Christians* 46

shows that, of all the signs and meanings of creation, Man's is most profound".[337] This is hardly a logic that we can follow today, but it was coherent, dynamic, outward looking and above all "it was a way to lead humans into the divine presence." So that while God remained transcendent, the world provided a way to God.

This came to an abrupt end in the 16th century with the rise of scientific inquiry which drastically altered the medieval cosmology; the sandy globe was not at the centre of creation (Jupiter had moons), but furthermore, "we think therefore we are". McFague suggests that buying into this idea, locating human existence in the mind, "this quaint and absurd suggestion, would be received with hearty guffaws from a medieval peasant."[338] It is this isolation of humans from nature, the rule of science as the describer of all reality, and the mechanisation of nature that is the model of the world we live in presently. We cannot go back to the Medieval model, the cosmology was wrong and the consequent logic exclusive. Indeed the cosmology used in Catholicism is still wrong, according to Michael Morwood, and is still one of its greatest stumbling blocks today.[339] Nevertheless, the medieval picture united everything, God, human beings, and nature – all things. The universe was orderly, humans were connected to each entity, living and non-living, nothing was just itself.[340] It held together, the glue held, as she says: "the medieval understanding of unit was based on a symbolic ontology: the assumption that all things participate in the ground of being and hence symbolize one another due to ontological similarities."[341] Ecological interdependence "is closer to a metaphorical understanding of connection – things are and are not similar".[342] The medieval understanding impressed the power of connection and oneness, the metaphorical or postmodern sensibility based on evolutionary theory is aware of both the connectivity through time as well as the negativities inherent in the 'evolutionary' process. She takes these two sides of the coin one step further using the images of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant'. For McFague 'Catholic'

---

[337] *Super, Natural Christians* 54
[338] *Super, Natural Christians* 48
[339] Morwood, Michael, 2002, *Tomorrow's Catholics: understanding God and Jesus in a new millennium.* Twenty-third Publications, 146p.
[340] *Super, Natural Christians* 49
[341] *Super, Natural Christians* 51
[342] *Super, Natural Christians* 51 "Is and is not."

stands for the wish for connectivity, continuity and coherence, that sees possibilities everywhere. In contrast 'Protestant' stands for rupture, division, scepticism, it is the typical postmodern mindset. The symbolic 'Catholic' sensibility insisting on the sacredness of order in the world, must be such as to satisfy the 'Protestant' metaphor of the differences, divergences and deterioration (sin).[343]

This discussion leads McFague to consider the fate of sacramentalism, which in previous essays she places on both vertical and horizontal routes, God's gift directly and through God's body, the world. "The interior vertical route starts with Augustine continues with the Reformation [and] into the twentieth century. [...] Counter-Reformation Catholicism was anti-nature, seeing divine action as limited to the supernatural".[344] With the Renaissance and the development of science, the natural and supernatural worlds are collapsed together into the secular world which had at its base understanding nothing beyond itself. With this the world becomes literalized, it is what we say it is without metaphor nor symbol. It is "an object to be analyzed, dissected, and commodified."[345] Because "I think therefore I am", everything is moved into our minds and nature is no longer a subject. With God transcendent, and humans "cut off" from nature, we are now alone. Nevertheless, we occupy our time trying to figure out how nature works. In the process we dissect it and only with difficulty can we put it back together. Even now we still do not understand that we have to "let things be what they are"[346] rather than seeking a necessarily very partial description which is the best we can ever manage within science. However, it should be stated that during the last four centuries we have been able to do away with some of the mythology and have come to understand some of the "natural" things as they are occurring, though not without creating some new myths along the way.

So what then is the arrogant eye? The arrogant eye only sees, nothing else. It does not touch, taste, or smell. What is seen is brought into the mind where reason deals with it.

---

[343] *Super, Natural Christians* 52
[344] *Super, Natural Christians* 58
[345] *Super, Natural Christians* 59
[346] *Super, Natural Christians* 62

Reason orders what is seen, reason understands what is seen and from that we know what is seen. The subject sees the object. This is the sequence that we follow in our time. It is new and, according to McFague, it is not just (four centuries) new, it is anomalous and is highly destructive of our world. The arrogance lies in the idea that seeing an object, using whatever means, is sufficient to know the object. The arrogance lies in the pretention that the eye mirrors nature, captures it completely. The arrogance lies in the position from which we see the object, which necessarily is only one perspective, which means that we do not in fact see the whole object. And finally the arrogance lies in that the object exists *in relation to the observer.* But here McFague returns to the reality that there is no 'innocent eye'. "Whatever we say about nature from our observation of it is, necessarily, reflections from the eye of the beholder and not merely pure and simple mirror images of it."[347] Perhaps the most insidious arrogance of the eye is the emergence of dualisms. Implicitly these are vectorial, they have a direction, they state a hierarchy, and they reflect values. The initial and most obvious is mind over matter; the eye sees the material object, through reason it comes to know it, and the bottom side of the dualism is seen as similar to nature. "Thus, male/female, white/colored, West/East, heterosexual/homosexual, educated/illiterate, rich/poor all illustrate the reason/nature dichotomy."[348] McFague identifies three features which render intimacy, mutuality and interdependence impossible.[349]

1. The subject denies dependency on the other.
2. The other is polarized through hyper-separation; radical exclusion is necessary in order to treat the other as object.
3. The bottom side of the dualism in incorporated into the top side as a result of being defined in terms of the top side.

Because it is doubtful that the world, as we are now beginning to understand it, can survive as a result of the way we actually live in it, McFague analysed the alternative, the Loving Eye. She proposes that if touch had been used instead of sight as the primary

---

[347] *Super, Natural Christians* 73
[348] *Super, Natural Christians* 88
[349] *Super, Natural Christians* 89

sense that we would now have a very different view and attitude toward the world. We each began by being touched, we are the fruit of touching. We both touch and are touched in the process, touching is mutual. "The primacy of touch also affects the way we *see* the others in the world."[350] As she says it will be an "in touch" vision. However touch includes its own limits: "other bodies resist when we push or pull them". This suggests that the intimacy of responsiveness is balanced by the limits of resistance. Touch then is not all powerful because in it there is the built-in response. Here again, McFague insists that just as sight is a model that we have adopted as a foundation for how we act on the world, so to touch is the alternative model, a metaphor that is evidently more attuned to how we actually live.[351]

In keeping with her thesis that "the isolated, superior, individual self surveying the world as landscape with the arrogant eye", she proposes instead the loving eye if we are to avoid "self-destructing".[352] This must be the basis of a subject-subjects model to replace the current subject-object model. Unfortunately, "as wide spread as this new sensibility is among postmodern thinkers, it has not become the current view in most of our cultural, political, economic, educational, scientific, nor even ecclesiastical institutions."[353]

To illustrate the radicalness of her proposal, she analyses the thesis of Martin Buber, "I and Thou", which might be expected to be appropriate as an expression of the subject-subjects model. He writes "the tree is not impression, no play on my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it – only in a different way."[354] This is not just a relationship with the tree, however, because "every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou[...]" Thus the subjects are occasions, a means for a mystical union with God in fleeting moments. But

---

[350] *Super, Natural Christians* 94
[351] *Super, Natural Christians* 94
[352] *Super, Natural Christians* 97
[353] *Super, Natural Christians* 99
[354] Buber, M., 1970, *I and Thou.* W. Kauffman, trans., New York, Charles Scribner's Sons. 8 quoted in *Super, Natural Christians* 100

as McFague notes that "it does not allow us to hold on hard to the huckleberries".[355] What she means is that a subject-subjects model that begins with touch, will "insist on being bonded to skin, fur, and feathers, to the smells and sounds of the earth, to the intricate and detailed differences in people and other life forms."[356] It is this that is lacking in Buber's thesis. This analysis reminds me of the story of the nun tending to a patient in the hospital. The patient wants to know why the nun did so with such devotion, to which she replies: "Because what I do to you I am doing to Jesus Christ." To which the patient replies" "I thought so, but when are you going to love me for me?" This is what McFague is demanding through her models, metaphors and constructions, that we come to see the world, the other, as profoundly as they are, and also images of the living God. "God is found in the depth and detail of life and the earth".[357] It is only then that we will have something commensurate with the needs of super, natural Christians.

The model McFague is proposing here is also consistent with the evolutionary cosmology that was discussed is Chapter 3. It is a natural system and as such many of the branches of the bush that have evolved are necessary for our survival. It is not simply a question of needing them for our pleasure, they are essential for us to continue being. Without the other life forms and without the "minerality of the earth" we cannot survive. Thus we must first recognize the fragility of the human self. Secondly, the model is not polarized between two, but is multiple; it is not in opposition, but is interactive. Nature is not something that we gaze upon but live in integrally. Thirdly, this relational model sees continuity between ourselves and others: "it is not afraid of the other but can see it as it is with love, with the recognition that the other exists for itself and not just for me."[358]

At the end of this essay, McFague returns to her original purpose of developing a Christian nature spirituality. "A Christian nature spirituality is about the present; in fact, it rests on waking up to what is right before our eyes. [...] Christian spirituality has

---

[355] Lewis, R.W.B., 1959, *Review: Hold on hard to the huckleberry bushes.* The Sewanee Review, v. 67, 3, p.462-477. quoted in *Super, Natural Christians* 102
[356] *Super, Natural Christians* 102
[357] *Super, Natural Christians* 102
[358] *Super, Natural Christians* 106

limited its sense of wonder to God (and to other human beings), but a Christian nature spirituality would extend it to nature. If spirituality means growing in sensitivity toward others – God, neighbour, and nature – then it means being present, being awake to them."[359]

## 4.2 RETHINKING THEOLOGY AND ECONOMY FOR A PLANET IN PERIL

McFague undertook this essay, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*, because she realised that it was not enough to love nature. Her thesis is that "We middle class North Americans are destroying it, not because we don't love nature but because of the way we live: our ordinary, taken-for-granted lifestyle." [360] We need to live differently and to arrive at that we need to think differently, "the unconscious picture of who we are that is the silent partner in all our behavior and decisions."[361] She faults her last book for not having included the principal driving force of our lifestyle; economics. She admits right away that to align our life with the reality of our world will require limitations and sacrifice, and a radically different view of abundance. Her plan then is to describe a Christian theology of the good life. Again in her modesty, 'it is just one such theology'.

Her point of departure is that we each have a vocation to sainthood. As Christians we are called to examine our life in order to discern the action of God in it "and then to express God's power and love in everything."[362] In a concrete way, we must develop our own theology and internalize it, and as Christians this means becoming like Christ. In the first chapter of this essay she has used her own conversions and credo as a means of situating the theology she proposes. She had four conversions. The first, in two stages, began when she realized as a seven year old that some day she would not exist, which eventually grew

---

[359] *Super, Natural Christians* 177
[360] *Life abundant* xi
[361] *Life abundant* xi
[362] *Life abundant* 3

into a sense of wonder that she *was* alive.[363] Its second stage was when she understood that "God" was the "name beneath, with, and in each of our names. [...] God is reality; God is the source of the reality of each of us."[364] Thus, God's name is first but each of our names are included and preserved within the divine reality. Her second conversion was the fruit of reading Barth's *Commentary on Romans*. She began to understand what the word God meant: "God is God and nothing else."[365] Her third conversion was more concrete in that she came to understand that writing and doing theology, was a form of activism. It was a means for her increasingly defined and deeply held beliefs to become embodied. However, she reveals that a piece was still missing, which was herself. As she writes: "Finally, after years of writing *about* God, I am becoming acquainted *with* God." [366] She went about this quite deliberately, she engaged a spiritual director and began meditating, setting aside time for relating to God. It has been revelatory: "I am meeting God and God is love."[367]

Her method as usual is to begin with experience before moving "toward a more or less comprehensive interpretation of God and the world. [...] This book tries to show how that attempt grows from a bare skeleton of a few deeply held beliefs to a fleshed-out theology for twenty-first-century Americans faced with unprecedented global crises."[368]

Her Credo can be described briefly as follows[369]:

- I believe that we live and move and have our being in God, that we belong to God, we are not alone; we live in God's world.
- The world is real and significant because God is incarnate – God is enfleshed, worldly.
- Because of the incarnation, I believe that God is love, God loves the world with various kinds of love: of a creator, friend, mother, father, artist, lover, scientist.
- God loves with disinterested, aesthetic appreciation and with exorbitant passion for justice for all creatures oppressed, outcast, or deteriorating.
- God's love is particular, constant, and universal.

---

[363] *Life abundant* 4
[364] *Life abundant* 5
[365] *Life abundant* 5
[366] *Life abundant* 8
[367] *Life abundant* 9
[368] *Life abundant* 17
[369] *Life abundant* 17-24

- I believe God is personal but not a person: for human beings, God cannot be less than personal.
- I believe in Jesus the Christ. His life is the revelation of God; it is a parable of God for Christians and a model for our own lives. Believing Jesus is the Christ is a risk filled belief.
- Through Jesus the Christ we lean the *content* of God's way with us and the way we should respond.
- Through the life and death of Jesus the Christ of God, I learn that God is revealed incarnate, which means God's way with, in and for the world.
- I believe in God's Spirit as the source of all life and love. We can only understand who we are and what we should do within the doctrine of who God is and what God has done and is doing. God incarnate means that there is only one world; where God is.
- Sin is living a lie, salvation is how we should live. Our place is planet Earth, our vocation is working with God toward the flourishing of all in our home. God's will is nothing less than our well being.
- "I believe in God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life; in Jesus Christ, in whom we see God at work for the flourishing of life; and in the Spirit, who works in us so we might live from, toward and with God."[370]

In view of this Credo, it is now her task to further her theology, which is to attempt to make certain universal statements, which will necessarily be hypothetical, partial, risky and limited.[371] Furthermore, all her statements will be metaphorical because our language about God is not descriptive. It is also done in a specific context; it is the oppressed groups of human being as well as the deteriorating parts of nature which are united in complex networks of interdependence.[372] She names it a North American Liberation Theology.[373] Its focus is the planetary ecology because of what is happening in the ecology of the planet where we live, where we are, and on which we are utterly dependent. But also because of *how* we live, it is having a disproportionate impact on other humans who in large part are quite unable to survive these dislocations to the environment.[374]

---

[370] *Life abundant* 23
[371] *Life abundant* 28
[372] *Life abundant* 30-31
[373] *Life abundant* 33
[374] McFague has used the expression "deteriorating environment", however, is 'changing environment' because of increased population not more appropriate? In which case, the environment is changing naturally in response. The general question will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The theology that McFague develops in this essay is "about economics and politics, consumerism and its alternatives, global warming and diversity, but as they contribute or diminish giving glory to God by loving the world."[375] She is attempting to make real what she describes as "a functional theology, one that makes sense of both our personal and public lives, one that can actually work for 'twenty-first-century North American Christians'."[376] To be workable it cannot be one from the past "because the metaphors, models, and concepts of such theologies were developed in a different context for a different world."[377] This does not mean that the scripture, tradition and teaching of the past are ignored. It does mean that they, through the channel of our experience, will be reflected on and reformulated by each theologian, that is each of us, so that we will act on the results of that reflection. This is the essential implication of developing a natural Christian spirituality, as discussed in the previous section, that each must be engaged in the process and that the end result is a praxis suited to our time but based on the past.

This theology has to face the reality that our "world view is essentially economic."[378] To survive we will have to obey "the house rules which are ecological, economic ones, having to do with the just division of basic resources among all the members of the family of life."[379] The implication and basic critique is that resources are not now being distributed equitably, and presumably have not been for some time. Two opposing models are implicitly at play in this matter.[380] The first model sees the planet as a corporation, a collection of individuals who gather together for the optimal use of natural resources. The second sees the planet more like an organism or community that survives and prospers through the interrelationship and interdependence of its human and non-human parts. The first model, the world view we are presently acting on, rests on 18th century assumptions of humans as individuals with rights and responsibilities, externally related to one another. The second model is based on postmodern science of humans as

---

[375] *Life abundant* 39
[376] *Life abundant* 57
[377] *Life abundant* 64
[378] *Life abundant* 72
[379] *Life abundant* 71-72
[380] *Life abundant* 72

the conscious and radically dependent part of the planet and the world as a community internally related one to the other.

### 4.2.1 Contemporary economic model and world view

Our functional world view is based on neo-classical economics, a science, a tool for understanding and prediction, which must be based solely on positive economics and which "is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgment".[381] The implication is that it is neutral. The neo-classical dimension was provided by John Adams, in the 18th century, in which capitalism is the allocation of scarce resources by means of decentralized markets essentially guided by self-interest. Even then resources were considered scarce. Thus it is not neutral and it implies an anthropology: human beings are individuals motivated by self interests. This undercuts Friedman's claim that so-called positive economics is not implicitly normative, that it is not speculative and personal, a matter of values and preferences that are beyond the science of economics.[382]

The individuality found within economics is among the principal fruits of the Enlightenment, but it is also the fruit of the Reformation: "the right of individuals to approach God directly, free of the mediation of clergy and church."[383] These two combined to constitute what is greatly cherished in American culture: "the right of every individual to choose what he or she wants and finds fulfilling."[384] The problem that this creates, however, is that the "issues of who benefits from an economic system and whether the planet can bear the system's burden are not part of neo-classical economics."[385] The way out of this as provided by economics, is the underlying presumption that in time and with enough growth everybody would benefit. In the 18th century this was perhaps realizable, however, in the 21st century with the world

---

[381] Friedman, Milton, 1953, *Essays in Positive Economics*. University of Chicago Press, 334p. 4 quoted in *Life abundant* 76
[382] *Life abundant* 76
[383] *Life abundant* 78
[384] *Life abundant* 78
[385] *Life abundant* 77

population of 6,1 billion in 2000, such a hope is simply unimaginable. There is not enough to go around and the measurable deterioration of the physical world cannot continue if we are to survive. What is impressive is that even before 2001, McFague was aware of the perceived consequences of the economic system in the form of global warming, which as she wrote "is the canary in the mine, whose death is the clue that our lifestyle lies outside the planet's house rules."[386]

This world view is at the base of our consumer society. Though originally limited to North America and Western Europe it is seen increasingly in South America and Asia; it is becoming globalised. It is a monumental challenge: the house rules are clear, and it is also clear that we are not living by them. We are consumers: we are "not citizens, or children of God, or lovers of the world, but consumers." [387]

### 4.2.2 Ecological economic model and world view

"Ecological economics begins with the viability of the whole community, on the assumption that only as it thrives now and in the future; will its various members, including human beings, thrive as well."[388] In short, it begins with sustainability and distributive justice. It is the community that must survive which is possible if all its members have access to its resources. Its values are the welfare and future of the planet. This model seeks to "maximize the optimal functioning of the planet's gifts and services."[389] As McFague says, this model is the vision of how humans ought to live where we belong, on this planet, now. This vision is based on today's science which is both evolutionary, from the Big Bang through to the finest branch of the evolutionary bush, and which necessarily defines the planet's ecology. This has come about by increasing differentiation resulting in individuality which is part and parcel of evolution. But it has also meant interdependence. "Nothing can be itself (in all its wonderful particularity) except by means of the whole. Everything is an individual but depends on

---

[386] *Life abundant* 92-93
[387] *Life abundant* 96
[388] *Life abundant* 100
[389] *Life abundant* 100

others to be this individual."[390] This is what the cosmology arising from Big Bang physics and from evolutionary biology is telling us. This is not make-believe; it is the fundamental anthropological implications of postmodern science. This constitutes the presupposition of ecological economics; which is our inalienable membership in the earth community – radical individuality and uncompromising community. This is a fundamental fruit of postmodern cosmology.[391] The planet has evolved with millions of living species and thousands of minerals and elements, there is no lack of individuals but Earth remains our one and only planet-community.

If the ecological economic model begins with sustainability and distributive justice, it is distributive justice which is its goal and the measure of its success is sustainability; how do we achieve the goal within the confines of sustainability? Difficult to answer and unfortunately there is no easy way such as "individual interests" which the current model can bank on. "We need a different model of who we are."[392] Nor is a conversion to the ecological paradigm a magic bullet. The ecological economic model "suggests a different way of being in the world that finds pleasure from something other than consumer goods and sees obligation as mutual responsibility."[393] The model claims that our happiness does not derive mainly from possessions but from community, its nurturing, its friendship, love and dedication to higher purposes. This is the sort of things that the model suggests. The challenge clearly is how this can be brought about. McFague insists that just as we came to "learn" to live within the current economic model so we can learn to live within an economic model which has as its core goal our survival. She sums up this model with three rules spelled out in typical down-to-earth language: "take only your share, cleanup after yourselves and keep the house in good repair for future occupants."[394]

---

[390] *Life abundant* 101
[391] *Life abundant* 104
[392] *Life abundant* 114
[393] *Life abundant* 115
[394] *Life abundant* 123

### 4.2.3 A theology for an evolutionary ecological world view

These then are the two models. She now presents the theology that she suggests is the underpinning of an appropriate economic model for our time. Here again she channels her reflection through her experience, her religious autobiography, which she "would claim, is in continuity with the Scriptures and the tradition."[395]

And so she begins with a blast. According to Augustine, God is the beloved, the lover and love itself. So what space is left for us? For McFague, "[i]t can only mean that our creation and fulfillment are included within God, that "God" is not an object, an explanation, or even a being, but the good news that reality is not indifferent or malevolent; rather, reality is with us and for us – on our side."[396] When she says in her Credo that she believes in God, she means that she trusts, at the deepest level, in the goodness of things. It means that her life, and all other life, is included within God's life and this is defined by love. Hence we become lovers of God.[397] The implication is that while God is wholly transcendent, God is at the same time utterly immanent. This she notes has always been affirmed in Hebrew and Christian tradition, though there has been a distinct tendency to stress God's transcendence.[398] She here extends her definition of theology. It is a reflection on one's faith channelled in one's experience and adds that it is "on experiences of God's liberating love from various contexts and within the Christian community." [399] With this, she is (finally) beginning to call her metaphorical theology a form of liberation theology. We must recall that this essay deals with Life Abundant in the context of the impact of our lifestyle on the deterioration of our planet. Hence "[t]he ecological economic model is open to beginning with God, because at the heart of this world view is the individual-in-community: everything is because of relationship of interdependence."[400] Thus since the action of God is liberation, and since we are at home (not tourists) in God's creation, but that our home is menaced by the way we live, it is

---

[395] *Life abundant* 128
[396] *Life abundant* 133
[397] *Life abundant* 133
[398] *Life abundant* 134
[399] *Life abundant* 135
[400] *Life abundant* 138

normal that God will act, through the interdependent community, to liberate this part of creation. The model she has developed and here brings into play is the metaphor of the world as God's body. "This metaphor is a combination of the classical agential and organic models. It suggests that we might think of God's transcendence as radical immanence: that is, God's love is totally, though not exhaustively, incarnated in the world." [401] All things are in and of God and here again she understands this as an example of panentheism, which she introduces to counterbalance the stress that is placed on God's transcendence in tradition.

What was unexpected in this essay is McFague's analysis of the work of the trinity in the world. "God is its creator, liberator and sustainer. The radically transcendent and radically immanent God is the source of everything that is, the power that frees creation from what would destroy it, and the love that nourishes it in every moment."[402] Having been most reluctant in previous essays to address this matter, McFague unabashedly declares that "[t]he trinity is an attempt to express the full dimensions of the experience of God as the One in whom we live and move and have our being; the one from whom we come, to whom we return, and in whose presence we live every minute".[403] In one sense then, the Trinity is about creating, liberating and sustaining all life. It is within the ecological economic world view that this might be possible. It is certainly not within the classical economic model "for the canary in the mine is dying". This triune God is intimately, indeed passionately, concerned about the well-being of all creatures, "not just the moral rectitude of human beings."[404] And if God is concerned with all life, God is necessarily concerned with the whole planet because it requires the whole planet to sustain all life. "We all of us, belong to God: we are the precious creations of God's hands and words, and we are the fruit of God's body".[405] As saviour or liberator, God's work continues because "[t]t is God's sign and seal that nothing can separate the world

---

[401] *Life abundant* 140 In the agential model God is acting in the world, God's transcendent love embraces all of history both human and natural. The organic model was discussed in Chapter 3.
[402] *Life abundant* 143
[403] *Life abundant* 143
[404] *Life abundant* 145
[405] *Life abundant* 145

from God's love, not even the most perverse and evil acts of human beings."[406] As sustainer, God cares about "just and sustainable planetary management, so that all creatures may flourish."[407] It is this God who looked upon the lilies and marvelled, it is this God who provided holes for foxes.

God, the trinity, is in the world, but is not the world. This "God is the source of all power, all love, all good in and with and for everything, at all times and place. [...] As the body of God, the world is a sacrament, *the* sacrament, the incarnation, of God, so that while each thing is itself in all its marvellous particularity and uniqueness, *it is at the same time and in and through its own specialness*, the presence of God."[408] By this she means that God is always present in mediated form: God is always with us.

Though God is always with us, what of evil; is reality good? This question is probably without an answer. There are two vital aspects to evil; first is the suffering that accompanies evil. Natural disasters are horrendous but by and large we are able to diminish their destructiveness; we are able to predict some types of disaster and thus avoid their destructiveness. The second is our participation in evil and in this we are able to outstrip nature. As for God's "implication", theodicy has essentially failed to explain how our loving God permits suffering.[409] As Elizabeth Johnson[410] has briefly discussed, the Shoah was perhaps the first time that evil has ever been wrought on such a scale. However it has not been the last. And despite our abiding faith, we have not come to a theology which entirely explains it. McFague raises one vital point: just as we are active participants in evil, so we can become active participants in good. We cannot stop natural disasters, we cannot stop disease by and large, but we can stop being evil. "Divine incarnation combined with our response of prophetic action on the side of the oppressed is the way that we can say, 'Yes, reality is good'."[411]

---

[406] *Life abundant* 146
[407] *Life abundant* 146
[408] *Life abundant* 150
[409] *Life abundant* 152-153
[410] Johnson, Elizabeth A., 2008, *Quest for the living God: mapping frontiers in the theology of God.* New York, Continuum, 234p. 51-66
[411] *Life abundant* 155

If God the creator is embodied and is ever with us, McFague has serious problems with the standard model of Christ the saviour and liberator. This model has the "mythological savior descending from heaven and, as the God-man, shows us how to live, forgives our sins, and wins eternal life for us."[412] Her problems with it are that it is not believable, and it is bad theology. It is not credible within the postmodern scientific understanding of reality. The descending and ascending pre-existent Christ, "of one substance with God" as well as fully human; these are barriers to believing in the reality of God. "This Christology is a scandal to the intellect, which Christology should not and need not be."[413] It is bad in the light of her framework. Specifically because it is a form of "Jesusolatry"; it is individualistic and anthropocentric; and it understands salvation in purely spiritual terms. Jesus does it all. The incarnation of God occurs this once and what he accomplishes through his death and resurrection is total salvation on our behalf.[414] Salvation or liberation is not a joint project in which we join with God in Christ to help all creatures flourish. It is only through Jesus that new life is given to us if we join with him. It is in this sense that McFague believes that the theology is bad "because it limits God and excuses us."[415] It limits God in that "we do not have to meet God in the face of a starving person or in the remains of a clear-cut forest."[416] What she has been presenting here is the christology which is commonly tied to the classical economic model. It is particularly a problem created during the Reformation and Counter Reformation which asserted the spiritual dimensions of Jesus' life and Christ's saving actions.

In many ways, we did not break out of that model until the arrival of liberation theologies that Christian faith has a "preferential option for the poor". To be sure, the roots of these theologies can be traced to the 19th century, but it is only in mid-20th century that this vision took hold. "Christian faith, they claim, is about God acting through Christ and with us for the well-being of all people, especially the oppressed. Jesus does not do it all;

---

[412] *Life abundant* 158
[413] *Life abundant* 158
[414] *Life abundant* 159
[415] *Life abundant* 159
[416] *Life abundant* 159

salvation is not just to alleviate individual sins; liberation must be for the body as well as the spirit."[417] As she argues, "[t]he renewal of creation, the salvation of the individual, and the liberation of the people were all seen as necessary components of the work of God in Christ."[418]

But can christology at the heart of Christianity be ecological? Can it be united into an ecological economic model which is her main thesis? God is with us prophetically and by covenant.[419] His ministry and death on the cross are both prophetic and the realization of the new covenant. These can be extended to nature. He cured the sick; what of the deterioration of the environment? He ate at table with the outcasts; has not Nature become the outcast, the "new poor"? If the good shepherd went after and cared for one percent of his flock, does he not care for the rest of creation? These are typical of the extensions that McFague makes between the Gospel of Jesus and her vision of a prophetic Christology.

She next proposes a sacramental Christology which in effect resides on God becoming incarnate. "[B]y bringing God into the realm of the body, of matter, nature is included within the divine reach."[420] This inclusiveness of nature is possible however, only "if Jesus the Incarnate Logos, Wisdom, or Spirit of God is paradigmatic of what is evident everywhere else as well. In other words, nature, not just Jesus, is the sacrament of God; the entire creation is *imago dei*". She states that this is suggested by Thomas Aquinas when he claims that the whole panorama of creation is needed to reflect the divine glory.[421] Such a Christology "says that God wants all of nature, human beings and all other entities, to enjoy well-being in body and spirit."[422] Thus it is neither solely human nor spiritual. "The focus of this Christology is not on Jesus except as the lens through

---

[417] *Life abundant* 161
[418] *Life abundant* 161
[419] *Life abundant* 167
[420] *Life abundant* 169
[421] *Life abundant* 169
[422] *Life abundant* 169

whom we see God. Hope for our world lies not only in what Jesus tells us to do, but also and more deeply, in Christian belief that God is with us as we attempt to do it."[423]

And how can we live a different abundant life? As disciples of Christ we are going to have to follow his way, his example. We cannot forget that he died on the cross, thus for his disciples the different abundant life will be cruciform: "reality has a cruciform shape"[424] and if we choose "solidarity with the oppressed it [will] result in cruciform living for the affluent."[425] However, our way of the cross will not be substitutionary death, "but the way of *God* in the world, always. Jesus is paradigmatic of God's eternal and constant siding with the outcasts and hence the inevitable meeting with diminishment and death that such association involves."[426] That we can assert that reality is good, does not end with cruciform living because there was the Resurrection which for McFague says that the many terrible forms of death are not the last word. "The resurrection is a promise from Reality Itself - from God - that life, and love, and joy, and health, and peace, and beauty are stronger than their opposites, [...] if we will follow the way of Jesus, the way of cruciform living."[427]

She ends this essay with a reflection on how living within and through an ecological economic world view and specifically how living in the Spirit might lead us. She begins this reflection with the statement by Küng that "Christians believe the world is hidden in God."[428] Her exegesis is that this is the same as saying that human existence takes place within God's Spirit. For Christians, the world does not have a separate existence. "I did not used to believe this. [...] I wanted the world to stand on its own."[429] And thus she introduces the third person of the Trinity. In this story, we are the body of God "spread out", we are God incarnate. We come from God, and we return to God, and in between we live in God's presence whether we know it or not. The universe in all its diversity and

---

[423] *Life abundant* 171
[424] *Life abundant* 168
[425] *Life abundant* 166
[426] *Life abundant* 179
[427] *Life abundant* 179
[428] *Life abundant* 181
[429] *Life abundant* 182

in each individual part, "make up the body of God."[430] This story is not a description any more than similar stories were in the past. But this one is commensurate with the world view she is proposing; that it is, it makes a claim which extends the cosmological, ecological world view. This claim is focused on Jesus of Nazareth who is the lens through which we see God.[431] And as a consequence she writes: "Human existence 'in the Spirit' means working 'in the body' so that it may flourish."[432]

To illustrate this last she shares her reading of the lives of two remarkable Christians, John Woolman and Dorothy Day, who each in their own time, found that to live the abundant life involved doing so in a cruciform way."[433]

John Woolman (1720-1772) was an American Quaker who spent his life preaching against slavery and excessive wealth, and the mistreatment of Indians. Successful in business, he sold it because it was too profitable, walked about the eastern United States on foot because the horses were cruelly treated, refused to use goods that were made as a result of the slave trade among many other similar "cruciform" habits. He realised early in his life that: "true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator, and learns to exercise true justice and goodness, not only toward all men, but also toward the brute creatures; that as the mind was moved by an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible Being, so, by the same principle, it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world;"[434] McFague remarks that the passage says nothing short of universal love to all creatures is "true religion". To live this credo, Woolman had to live a life that ranged between the awkward to the painfully sacrificial. He persisted to the end, and late in life had a dream in which he heard a voice to say "John Woolman is dead." He interpreted this to mean the death of his own will. Crucial to his persistence was that how he lived – simply and with

---

[430] *Life abundant* 183
[431] *Life abundant* 184
[432] *Life abundant* 186
[433] *Life abundant* 194-195
[434] Woolman, John, 1961, *The journal and a plea for the poor*. New York, Corinth, 249p. 8-9 quoted in *Life abundant* 189

empathy - opened the possibility of adequate food and clothing for all people as well and care for other creatures.[435]

Dorothy Day (1897 – 1980) was a middle-class American Christian who saw the world as hidden in God. Throughout her life, she explicitly sought out the alternative abundant life. "I wanted life and I wanted the abundant life. I want it for others too. [...] I wanted every home to be open to the lame, the halt and the blind, the way it had been after the San Francisco earthquake. Only then did people really live, really love their brothers. In such love was the abundant life and I did not have the slightest idea how to find it."[436] With Peter Morin, she founded the *Catholic Worker Movement* and through this eventually realized that it is not poverty which is at the center of their work, but community. As McFague comments: "The remarkable thing about Day's reenvisonment of the abundant life is its embrace of the prophetic and sacramental dimensions of the life, ministry, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[437] I end this part of this thesis with an excerpt from Day's autobiography which marvellously summarizes McFague's hope.

> We are not alone anymore. [...] We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of the bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.[438]

## 4.3 GOD, THE WORLD AND GLOBAL WARMING

In the epilogue to her previous essay, McFague is discouraged. She sees the vital need to come to terms with a deteriorating environment, which she considers is the result of our world view and which is actualized through an economic model which effectively tears apart community as the basis of living. All the while the Churches at that time (2000)

---

[435] *Life abundant* 190
[436] Day, Dorthy, 1952, *The long loneliness: the autobiography of Dorothy Day*. New York, Harper and Row, 288p. 44 quoted in *Life abundant* 191
[437] *Life abundant* 192
[438] *The long lonliness* 317

were preoccupied with sexual morals concerning homosexuality, abortion, celibacy, and the ordination of women. As she wrote, "[t]he churches appear to be in a state of cultural captivity."[439] In this last of her essays to date, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming*, she is again very preoccupied by the shadow of global warming which previously had only been in the background.

The immediate cause for this was the publication of the 4th Assessment Report (AR) prepared by the Intergovernamental Panel on Climate Change, within the United Nations.[440], which sounded the alarm concerning the increasing rate of climate warming. This increase in temperature is more or less correlated with the emission of so called hot house gases and aerosols.[441] The purpose of the report was to present these concerns, based on scientific modeling, to governments whose responsibility it is to undertake appropriate policy. Thus for example, the 4th AR states: "Societies across the world have a long record of adapting and reducing their vulnerability to the impacts of weather and climate related events such as floods, droughts and storms. Nevertheless, additional adaptation measures will be required at regional and local levels to reduce the adverse impacts of projected climate change and variability, regardless of the scale of mitigation undertaken over the next two to three decades."[442] The interpretations in the report are indeed alarming, which is perhaps its greatest weakness.[443]

Nevertheless, McFague's response as a theologian has been to once again plunge her theology into a global context with all its explicit and implicit ramifications. Her purpose is to further investigate the appropriateness of her metaphorical theology and further refine it within this new perception of the state of the planet's environment. As she explains, this report revealed that the deterioration was more than just a suggestion;

---

[439] *Life abundant* 203

[440] IPCC 2007

[441] I use the expression "more or less" because a correlation is not in any way an indication of causes and because of their nature, the correlations cannot be inverted. This is the fundamental weakness/fallacy of the report. Models are presented in the report but they cannot be validated so as to support projections. Hence interpretations are necessarily subjective, regardless of whether or not they represent a consensus.

[442] IPCC 2007 56

[443] We must keep in mind the distinction between objectivity which is attainable in experimentation and the inevitable inclusion of subjectivity in interpretations.

ongoing measurements were being made and historical geological and biological evidence supported the conclusions, and the conclusions were far worse than might have been anticipated. She "thought she had some science around which nobody, and in particular no government, could squeeze. It is not just one scientist saying this; it is 2500 scientists who are in agreement."[444] The basic thesis then is that we are now in this apprehended state because of the way we have been living for the last several centuries, and in particular, with a world view at its origin that is based on the neo-classical economic model.

This essay presents a particular set of challenges. Nearly every chapter or section repeats in some form the underlying problematic related to the global state of the environment and a revisit of aspects of her metaphorical theology. I will respect this manner of structuring the essay and attempt to present the train of thought as succinctly as possible.

Throughout the essay, she uses two competing models of ways that we can live and each of which has its set of consequences. The first is the neo-classical economic model in which we humans are nothing more than individual subjects living within a machine, and the world is composed of externally interacting objects. We are governed by our self-interests and use the world to our individual best advantage; in essence the world functions as integrated but separate parts. The second, the ecological economic model is that, in fact, the world is an interrelated and interdependent community of living and inanimate subjects and that life is entirely dependent on all parts of our world. We cannot do without other lifeforms and they are dependent on humans to "follow the house rules" for their survival.[445] Hence, the looming disaster that is implied by environmental deterioration. The role of religion is directly linked to one or other model but with differing results. The tendency to promote religion as essentially individualistic and its concomitant notion that salvation means the redemption of individuals from their sins, leaves us free to go our way, as we please, without regard for the impact of our lifestyle. However, if religion is a "public issue", if therefore salvation means the well-being of all

---

[444] Personal communication. November 2008
[445] *A New Climate for Theology* 37

creation here and now, then the economic model we live by is of central concern[446] She asserts that the ecological economic model with its intrinsic components of distributive justice and sustainability, discussed above, are reflections however "pale of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God."[447] McFague argues that the Eucharistic banquet at the heart of the Christian gospel, is similarly faintly reflected in the ecological economic model of living on our planet.[448]

To the obvious question which arises, "can we meet the challenge?", she answers with a definitive yes. Her inspiration is Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "[f]or it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This is the light of creation and the light of salvation in the face of Christ, in one sentence. "The same light that created us now saves us and shines within us so that we know it."[449] Further: "We need to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus [...] who died in order to live – in order that all of us might see a new way to live. [...]The death of Jesus says to us that living in solidarity with others, even when it involves sacrifice and suffering, is the only way to life."[450]

Despite this obvious good news, in fact it is not how we live. For the most part, we in the West consider ourselves as individuals with the right to personal pleasure and gain. It is up to each to work hard and compete for scarce resources (the neo-classical economic model). We have individual responsibility towards others, but we "do not think of ourselves as members of a community, not a human community and even less as a natural or planetary community."[451] And so McFague returns to the original problematic which is that climate change demands that we turn our eyes to the world. She will not let us be detained long from reality which is space and place, the concrete. And this leads to the Catholic-Protestant polarity discussed earlier, which is the continuity and linkages that a

---

[446] *A New Climate for Theology* 36
[447] *A New Climate for Theology* 37
[448] *A New Climate for Theology* 38
[449] *A New Climate for Theology* 39
[450] *A New Climate for Theology* 39
[451] *A New Climate for Theology* 44

Catholic view would favour, in contrast to the limits and prophetic view that the Protestant sensibility proposes. "On the matter of creation and providence, is it a question of why, when, and how the world was created that is critical, or is it rather discovering the nature, potential and limitations of our neighborhood, where we live?"[452] I think the answer is, yes, both; and so, eventually, does McFague in this essay. She concludes that they, creation *and* providence, are the most basic relationships between God and the world, because they are essentially about God's transcendence and God's immanence. Yes God is the One Reality, and yes God is in the world and the world is God's body and yes we are in God: "God is with us here and now. [...] God is intrinsically intimate."[453] The implications of this are monumental in her metaphorical theology. "An incarnational context for understanding the God-world relationship has implications of our response to climate change. It means that *we and God are in the same place and that we share responsibility for the world.*"[454]

This runs quite against the traditional creation myth as understood by the Vatican I Council in which the God-world relationship is one of utter distance and difference.[455] God is in charge from beginning to end, the only questions to be answered then are why? not where? But what of creation, where we find ourselves? Vatican I is more interested in history than in geography.[456] Her problem is that it is geography which is in danger, the world, not history, which can be recounted beside fireplaces for ever if there is anybody there to tell and hear. "This God does not inhabit creation; in fact, the assumption behind this creation story is that spirit and matter are entirely distinct and in a dualistic, hierarchical relationship. [...] It is difficult to overstate the importance of this assumption, [...] because it not only encourages an understanding of salvation as the escape of individuals to the spiritual world, but also justifies the lack of attention to the flourishing

---

[452] *A New Climate for Theology* 62
[453] *A New Climate for Theology* 63
[454] *A New Climate for Theology* 63
[455] *A New Climate for Theology* 64 also
http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum20.htm#SESSION%203%20:%2024%20April%201870
accessed June 2011
[456] *A New Climate for Theology* 65

of this world."[457] Her near vehemence here is because the models of who we think we are and our relation to God and the world "determine how we should behave".[458] If we get that wrong, poor world. She here reviews the deistic, dialogic, monarchical, and agential models and does not find one that is fundamentally concerned with God *and* creation. In one way or another, they all leave us separated from God. Her criteria are spatial (from), she does not say it but clearly her cry is "*Where* is my beloved?" And her answer is based on a beautiful passage from Saint Augustine.

> Since nothing that is could exist without You, You must in some way be in all that is; [therefore also in me, since I am]. And if You are already in me, since otherwise I should not be, why do I cry to You to enter into me? [...] I should be nothing, utterly nothing, unless You were in me - or rather unless I were in You "of Whom and by Whom and in Whom are all things». So it is, Lord. So it is. Where do I call You to come to, since I am in You? Or where else are You that You can come to me? Where shall I go, beyond the bounds of heaven and earth, that God may come to me, since He has said: "Heaven and earth do I fill?"[459]

The importance of this is that here in the 5th century, Augustine seems to be saying what McFague has been arguing for 30 years. "If God is always incarnate – if God is always in us and we in God – then Christians should attend to the model of the world as God's body." And as a consequence, we must attend to the state of God's body which is undergoing severe deterioration as apprehended in the IPCC 4th Assessment Report. At least, she states, her "model is commensurate with the central Christian affirmation that God is with us in the flesh in Jesus Christ, and it is a model that is particularly appropriate for interpreting the Christian doctrine of creation in our time of climate change."[460] It is particularly appropriate because it is primarily interested in neighbourhood, that is space, rather than history. What is implied by this model is that we must know our geography (our world); we can only acknowledge God as the source of all "life, love, truth and goodness; and that we are in charge (have power over creation), as is

---

[457] *A New Climate for Theology* 65
[458] *A New Climate for Theology* 66
[459] *A New Climate for Theology* 72 also http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0722026234/ref=olp_product_details?ie=UTF8&me=&seller=#reader_0722026234 accessed June 2011
[460] *A New Climate for Theology* 73

God.[461] This last is because we are (as far as we know) the only part of creation on this planet which is self-conscious – we know that we know. Hence "we have become partners with God to maintain the health of creation."[462] The implication here is that it is not only God who "is in charge"; we as the prime defacers, also have "our charge", which is the responsibility of keeping the "house rules". Further, a vital implication of the embodiment of God in the universe is that it "is the reflection of God's being, God's glory; it is the sacrament of God's presence with us. The most radically transcendent understanding of God is, then, at the same time the most radically immanent understanding."[463]

We have seen how models can be developed which help as far as they can, dealing with this crisis theologically. But what is religion's role in all this? Religion is primarily about *doing* something, it is not simply *believing* something: specifically it is about "enacting love in the world."[464] And the most distinctive activities according to McFague are gratitude toward God and compassion towards others. Gratitude is one of our hallmarks no matter what we believe; we will always celebrate in thanksgiving. And this, despite all the suffering, all the tragedy that befalls us: "and in the midst of it, some people, many people, end up full of praise, feeling blessed and wanting to bless."[465] She suggests that this almost innate tendency to praise, give thanks and "do" compassion is an intimation of transcendence. It is almost as though love of neighbour is on the same footing as praise to God. In which case, "the central project of religion is grounded in ethics, not theology." [466] In practice, we spend more time trying to live as we ought than we do considering God's existence. Her purpose with this thought is to suggest again that: "The model of the world as God's body grounds Christian praise and doing in the ordinary, physical world. It suggests that the conventional meaning of transcendence [earlier only intimated] as other than this world, beyond and separate from this world, is subverted into

---

[461] *A New Climate for Theology* 74
[462] *A New Climate for Theology* 75
[463] *A New Climate for Theology* 77
[464] *A New Climate for Theology* 102
[465] *A New Climate for Theology* 103
[466] *A New Climate for Theology* 104

transcendence as radical immanence."[467] Thus this idea expressed in other essays, takes on a new and deeper colour in the context of the perceived environmental crisis. The world then as God's body implies that God is the milieu in which we exist in every way such that all begins and ends with the body. In this, she can say that this world, this reality, is divine. The divine is both physical and spiritual with no "absolute line dividing matter and spirit, body and soul, nature and humanity, or the world and God. Contemporary science tells us this, but it is also the heart of incarnational thinking."[468] Following this McFague then draws a fairly deep line in the sand: "The model of the world as God's body suggests a creation theology of praise to God and compassion for the world in contrast to Christian theologies of redemption that focus on sin and on escape from the world."[469] Her central point here is that there is no need for transcendence to always mean what is *not* mundane. McFague is again particularly taken with "God is Emmanuel", which is the sacramental (Catholic) sensibility of Christianity; that is, continuity between God and the world, nature and Scripture. In contrast, the prophetic (Protestant) sensibility insists on discontinuity, disruption, that is *sola Scriptura.*[470]

This model returns her to the importance of space as opposed to history. We live, in the light of this model, in the divine milieu. As the sacramental (Catholic) sensibility insists, "this world is the only reality available to us and in and through it, we find God. [...] Thus we have permission to love the body of the world, and through the world's beauty to find intimations of God. "[471] However, this raises a difficult point. In all her essays the words creation, world and nature have been more or less synonymous. But what of the fact that most of the world's population lives in cities or suburbs?[472] This is difficult for two reasons. The first is that cities expose the problem of space, its use, its availability, and its sharing. By and large the space used by humans is determined mainly by the neo-classical economic model; the more successful you are within that world view the

---

[467] *A New Climate for Theology* 105
[468] *A New Climate for Theology* 105
[469] *A New Climate for Theology* 105
[470] *A New Climate for Theology* 111
[471] *A New Climate for Theology* 114
[472] *A New Climate for Theology* 121

"better" the space you will live in.[473] The second reason is that as city dwellers we are essentially removed from "first nature", "raw nature"; thus, indeed, what is nature? Many city dwellers do not realise that 100 percent of what they use, let alone eat and drink, comes from "nature", whether it is cement, asphalt, glass, metal, plastic, energy. And all the transformation from raw materials into what we use requires energy, which nature provides as well. Furthermore, everything we eat and much of what we drink, began as a patch of vegetation. But this is "displaced" nature. And in the final analysis, there is nowhere on the planet that has not been "humanized" whether as the result of one of us having walked there or because our "exports" have been transported there by the wind. Thus despite our ability to transform first nature into our cities, we can never get away from the fact that we are utterly dependent on first nature for everything.

Both of these factors, space and nature, and their intrinsic finiteness, suggest the need for setting limits, hence the need for the prophetic, kenotic (Protestant) sensibility. "Kenosis means to empty, to pull back, to limit."[474] This is true of both creation and incarnation. God allowed space in creation for others as an affirmation of the other, "It is good."[475] Whereas in the incarnation, Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7). In both then, there is limitation. And we are invited to a similar self-emptying within our space in our world, in our time. "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Phil 2:4).[476]

McFague ends this book much as she did her last, that is with a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in creation and in our lives. It is essentially an ending filled with hope. After acknowledging again that she "had got it wrong" about the Holy Ghost, she takes up Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem I. Written in 1877, Hopkins decries the destruction of the world he knows as the result of the ongoing industrial revolution. And as McFague

---

[473] *A New Climate for Theology* 123
[474] *A New Climate for Theology* 135
[475] *A New Climate for Theology* 135
[476] *A New Climate for Theology* 136

says, the hope for its restoration is not in the restorative powers of nature but "in the warm breast and bright wings of the Holy Ghost", quoting Hopkins.[477] Thus no matter how bad things get, there is hope. "God's power of motherly brooding that hovered over the chaotic waters at creation is with us still in the bright, rising wings of each new morning."[478] Hopkins' hopefulness, and hers, lies in their belief that the world lies within God. This is her metaphor of creation as the body of God. As she says, "the world is charged with God as if with electricity. [...] [E]ach scrap of creation becomes more itself as it lives more completely within God, [...] and this can be most adequately expressed with the metaphor of 'spirit'."[479] She is saying again her view of what is at the heart of an incarnational understanding of creation, that we live within the body of God, within the One Reality, and that that Reality is on the side of life and its fulfillment. This for her is Christian mysticism – it is incarnational; we live in God through the world.[480]

---

[477] *A New Climate for Theology* 159
[478] *A New Climate for Theology* 160
[479] *A New Climate for Theology* 162
[480] *A New Climate for Theology* 163

# CHAPTER 5

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the preceding chapters I have described McFague's theology with a minimum of commentary in an attempt to present it as openly as possible. There are needless to say many threads which evolved in the course of her essays. In the following two major sections some of these are discussed in the context of McFague's work itself and others on the basis of the secondary literature. These include her methodology, her theology with respect to tradition, her feminism, and general aspects of her areas of contextualisation.

## 5.1 MCFAGUE'S WORK

### 5.1.1 McFague's methodology

The methodology proposed at the outset of this thesis was to let the theologian explain her own methodology. This can now be done relatively succinctly. Each of her essays, as she refers to her books, begins with some set of starting points and premises that have been detailed in Chapter 2. They have certain characteristics in common. The most typical starting point can be expressed by *cherchez l'opprimé*, to change the metaphor. She is distressed by the dominance of hierarchical dualisms which have various negative implications and *in extremis* represent real oppression of many kinds. The most common is that the first part of a dualism is always dominant over the second. They are never on an equal footing. Thus, it is really the rich over the poor, the male over female, mind over matter. This leads to dualisms that tear at the heart of her theology including soul over body, humans over nature, which tear at the world we live in.

A second set of starting points and premises are developed in her essays in which she puts her metaphorical theology into more or less specific contexts. This applies particularly to her last three essays. And here again she uncovers and underscores the oppressive impacts of the contexts in which she couches her theology. These include the

threat of the destruction of life, and the concomitant erasing of consciousness in creation resulting from nuclear holocaust; the insidious destruction and deterioration of all life and our physical environment ensuing from our world-view based on the neo-classical economic model by which we live; and the apprehended crisis state of the Earth's environment and potential massive dislocations of all sorts due to warming of the climate.

Both of these sets of premises and McFague's evaluations of the corresponding times, provide general all-encompassing contexts, whether social or environmental. Both call for some sort of interruption or discontinuity of the existing perceived "state of affairs", of our "world view". Both are the basis for developing her metaphorical theology; whether it is the introduction of new metaphors and theological models or the deepening of our basic understanding of existing theological and religious realities. The first of these and fundamentally the most important has been "that the root-metaphor of Christianity is not God the father but the kingdom or rule of God, a relationship between the divine and the human that *no* model can encompass."[481] Though she first uses this expression in lower case, it becomes progressively central as she links this to the work of the trinity, which initially is also limited to the lower case. Thus her methodology is to raise a specific and typically all encompassing problematic and address it on that basis with her social, anthropological and finally theological response.

### 5.1.2 McFague and tradition

From the outset, the question of the links of McFague's metaphorical theology to tradition was important in this thesis. However, McFague addresses this problem directly in one of her first essays.[482] Any modern theology must consciously interpret both tradition, and the context, as channelled by experience. The understanding or reflection on the context must address an understanding of the ultimate norm of the Christian tradition from which to address the context.[483] This is the so-called method of correlation

---

[481] *Metaphorical theology* 146
[482] *Models of God* 40-45
[483] *Models of God* 41

and I wonder if it is not equivalent to that understood by Schillebeeckx. She assumes that this method is sufficiently broad "because of [Christianity's] claim to be both historical and contemporary."[484] Her initial understanding for the need of this correlation was provided by Cobb[485]:

> The unity of Christianity is the unity of an historical movement. That unity does not depend on any self-identity of doctrine, vision of reality, structure of existence, or style of life. It does depend on demonstrable continuities, the appropriateness of creative changes, and the self-identification of people in relation to a particular history.

Thus in particular, we have the earliest traditions concerning Christ, his ministry, death, resurrection and appearances in written form, Scripture. However they cannot be the last word if Christianity can claim to be contemporary. In which case Scripture is then only paradigmatic, "one cannot distil some eternal truths from the 'story of Jesus' and then cast the story aside."[486] No, it remains to be distilled again for each today. And so she addresses the problematic directly: "How does a metaphorical theology understand its Christian norm; in other words, what does it say about the authority of Scripture, tradition and experience?"[487] Does such a metaphorical theology interpret the continuities within the Christian paradigm for our time?

She argues that the dividing lines between these three components of Scripture, tradition, and experience are in fact fuzzy. In short, tradition is based on experience and Scripture is the written version of the earliest traditions. While experience is the starting point, it is not the primary reference. She refers to the "sedimentations"[488] of interpreted experience, in which she includes many other writings that are not included in Scripture, as integral parts of tradition.[489] In view of the thousands of experiences that make up Scripture and tradition, it is McFague's contention that: "Our primary datum is not a Christian message

---

[484] *Models of God* 41
[485] Cobb, John, 1981, *Feminism and Process thought: a two-way relationship.* in Feminism and process thought. ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney, New York, Edwin Mellen Press. 42 quoted in *Models of God* 194
[486] *Models of God* 41
[487] *Models of God* 41
[488] As a geologist I would say that the process is "sedimentation" and the result is "stratigraphy"!
[489] *Models of God* 42

for all time which becomes concretized in different contexts; rather, it is experiences of women and men witnessing to the transforming love of God interpreted in a myriad of ways."[490]

The next step in this question is the definition of the basic characteristics of the Christian understandings of the God-world relationship. It is against this that each theology forges its correlations with the past. McFague has done this progressively in the development of her metaphorical theology by drawing the general lines of the correlation.[491] A detailed analysis of this vital question is perfectly feasible, however, it is beyond the limits of this thesis.

### 5.1.3 McFague's feminism

McFague analyses the positions and fruits of two groups of feminists; she does this in the context of her analysis of whether the metaphor "God the father" is a model or an idol. Feminist theologians agree on at least one issue; the patriarchal model, developed and maintained over almost two thousand years, can no longer be tolerated. However she insists that in a metaphorical theology one "always hears that whisper '[it is] and it is not'"[492] Revolutionary feminists rely essentially on women's experience. Hence as religion is the interpretation of the meaning of experience at its most profound level, we would find ourselves at the brink of a new religion. However, McFague doubts that an immanental, exclusively feminist perspective could be absorbed into the Christian paradigm.[493]

Nevertheless, a reformer feminist sees genuine insight for the needed revisions in this paradigm. "Reformers believe that the root-metaphor for Christianity is human liberation, not patriarchy, that liberation of women can occur within the Christian paradigm. [...] Christian liberation at its most profound level must address human bondage to the

---

[490] *Models of God* 44
[491] Discussed at length in Section 3.3.
[492] *Metaphorical theology* 152
[493] *Metaphorical theology* 155

conventions and expectations of the ways of the world in contrast to the freedom of life according to the way of God's new rule." [494]

McFague is a reformer feminist, and is clearly sensitive to the feminist critique of dualisms and hierarchical images dominant in Christianity. They have reinforced the oppression of women, the poor, the outcast, the marginal, the colored, and non-human nature. She does not hesitate to use feminist analysis critically in the same way that she was inspired by Process thought, Scripture, poetry, and spiritualities from all peoples and religions, a position she repeats several times. Has McFague used certain aspects of feminist methodology? Clearly. However, does this constitute a feminist theology? Clearly not. Indeed time and again both she in her essays and others in the secondary literature remind us that what is being said in virtually any theology "is and is not"; the leitmotif of metaphor. Repeatedly in her essays, after digressions into various particular questions, McFague comes back and reminds us that what is important is to remember that "this is a metaphor".

To conclude this evaluation of her feminism, McFague discusses the use of the word *Abba* in the Gospels and in particular the ideas of Edward Schillebeeckx in this regard. It had been proposed by Elizabeth Schüsler Fiorenza that there are strong feminine images of God in the New Testament; however, the images are conditioned as a function of Jesus' image of God as father.[495] Similarly, Joachim Jeremias and Robert Mamerton-Kelly suggest that Jesus' address of God as *Abba* portrays similar intimacy.[496] Schillebeeckx dealt with this question in a way that obviously greatly impressed McFague. "In Jesus' time what the *Abba* signified for the son was authority and instruction. [...] Thus the *Abba* experience of Jesus, although meaningful in itself, is not a self-subsistent religious experience, but is also an experience of God as "Father", caring for and offering a future to his children, a God, Father, who gives a future to the man who

---

[494] *Metaphorical theology* 164-165

[495] Schüsler Fiorenza, Elizaeth, 1992, *Feminist sprituality, christian identity, and catholic vision.p.*136-148 in Womanspirit rising: A feminist reader in religion., eds. Carol*p.* Christ and Judith Plaskow, Harper Collins Publishers, 298p. 136

[496] *Metaphorical theology* 170

from a mundane viewpoint can be vouchsafed no future at all."[497] As McFague reflects, this does not escape from the model of God as father, but instead it an understanding of God as the One who is "bent on humanity", who wills the liberation of the abandoned and rejected. Jesus' *Abba* address suggests radical obedience to a God "whose reign [as announced by Jesus of Nazareth] was a reversal of expectations, offering liberation to the excluded."[498] For McFague this "can be seen as of crucial importance to reformist feminists attempting to find resources within the Christian tradition for relevant ways of speaking of God."[499] Her purpose then is not feminism as such but a relevant theology in today's context.[500]

### 5.1.4 McFague and ecology

It would appear that McFague has been 'taken' by nature nearly all her life. As a child she played freely near her home on Long Island and as a young adult loved hiking which she continues to do. Her interest, her closeness is with its very physicality, the 'thingness' of it. She is also taken by the notions of wildness and wilderness, particularly in her early essays. I see this as an American wistfulness, perhaps for lost innocence, certainly for lost "first naivity". We forget or do not realize that humans have inhabited every continent (except possibly Antarctica) on a permanent basis for at least 40 000 years, and if some possible artefacts are accepted, then it has been 125 000 years. I mention this because there has not been any wilderness for a long time; "nature" has been humanized since virtually the beginning of our species. Though McFague is apparently not aware of this, it is not what she is essentially interested in. What is most important is that until the 17th century humans were very much in communion with nature (if that is not too strong a word); they lived as though they knew they were dependent on it. This appears to have been the case in virtually every culture. It is most evidently the case in aboriginal

---

[497] *Jesus, an experiment in Christology* 262-263 quoted in *Metaphorical theology* 172
[498] *Metaphorical theology* 172
[499] *Metaphorical theology* 172
[500] It is interesting that even at this early stage, McFague uses the word "liberation" without, however, suggesting it as a possible description of her own theology. It remains for others to do this, but sometimes at the risk of missing McFague's point.

cultures. It is expressed in both cultural as well as in religious practices throughout the world.

But with the 17th century we began to leave it aside, intellectually and culturally, and, more explicitly, saw it within a utilitarian perspective. Nature eventually became "natural resources" which are there to be exploited and commodified. It was only in the 20th century, that we began to be broadly and seriously worried about the state of the non-human world, and that concerted efforts were begun to rediscover "nature". What is rediscovered is that we are fundamentally interrelated and integral to the whole of nature both in an evolutionary sense, but also as the sole means of our survival as a species. And reciprocally, there is nature's need for us to live within the limits of this world.

The evolution of McFague's understanding of nature which she alludes to in her essays, seems to have fed her metaphorical theology. However, it is only in the last two essays that this correlation is made explicit. I am particularly struck by the development of her understanding of embodiment and her insight into the Incarnation and, though more hesitantly, the Trinity. Understanding the trinity (lower case) was a challenge for her in her second essay, though she developed an implicit parallelism.[501] Similarly, the metaphor of the world-creation as God's body is explicit but tentative. In marked contrast, this metaphor is the main purpose of her fourth essay, though the trinity remains relatively difficult for her as a model of God's responses to Creation.[502] And in particular, the "holy ghost" is simply too weak an image for her. But by the last essay, the Incarnation is central to Christianity, and God in creation and creation in God is in the foundation of her theology. And in the very last sentence, of her last essay, the Holy Spirit (upper case) is now central in this quotation from Gerald Manly Hopkins: "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."[503]

---

[501] *Metaphorical theology* 173
[502] *Models of God*
[503] *A New Climate for Theology* 172

## 5.2 SECONDARY STUDIES

There are four themes that constitute the secondary studies of McFague's theology: critiques of her approach to literary analysis, her methodology, her orthodoxy, and the appropriation of her ideas in other studies. I summarize analyses of different aspects of her work in the following sections.

### 5.2.1 Literary foundations

An analysis by Kjärgaard[504] of McFague's work was one of the first and toughest because he delved into the literary foundations of her metaphorical theology and found them wanting.[505] His attention was focused on her principal proposition, that is, the equivalence between metaphor and parable; as she often repeated "a parable is an extended metaphor". Kjärgaard presented McFague's basic ideas quoting three contiguous sentences:

> A parable is an extended metaphor. A parable is not an allegory, where the meaning is extrinsic to the story, nor is it an example story where, as in the story of the Good Samaritan, the total meaning is within the story.
>
> Rather, as an extended metaphor, the meaning is found only *within* the story itself, although it is not exhausted *by* that story.
>
> At the same time that a parable is an aesthetic whole and hence demands rapt attention on itself and its configurations, it is open-ended, expanding ordinary meaning so that from a careful analysis of the parable we learn a new thing, are shocked into a new awareness. [506]

As Kjärgaard underscores, the objective of McFague's analysis is to develop the idea that:

---

[504] Kjärgaard, Mogens Stiller, 1986, *Metaphor and parable: a systematic analysis of the specific structure and cognitive function of the synoptic similes and parables qua metaphors.* Acta Theologica Danica, v.20, Leiden: Brill, 264p.

[505] *Speaking in parables*

[506] *Metaphor and parable* 13 *italics* are McFague's in *Speaking in Parables* 13

> There are no explicit statements about God, everything is refracted through the earthly metaphor or story. Metaphor is, I believe, the heart of the parabolic tradition of religious reflection as contrasted with the more propositionally oriented tradition of regular or systematic theology.[507]

Kjärgaard makes two points in his analysis:

1. The whole of McFague's hypothesis rides on the declaration, which she does not analyse nor try to justify, that a parable is an extended metaphor; and
2. that in effect this supposition on her part is based on a stipulative proposition[508] proposed by Dodd (1936) and subsequently taken up by Funk (1966), Via (1967), Wilder (1971) and Crossan (1973).

He repeats several times that McFague did not question the origin of her supposition, that all the while it was never demonstrated, and that the definition had simply acquired a "traditional acceptance". This is in some ways the sort of criticism that can be made of her work. McFague has a long list of things to discuss and it would seem that she could not deal with all of them "while on her way".

A second example is found in Tolbert in reference to the same work by McFague. Tolbert uses McFague's exact equation of parable and metaphor as illustrative of "both unfounded assertions and exaggerated claims of power for the parables".[509] Tolbert's argument is that, according to McFague, since metaphors cannot be interpreted nor can parables be interpreted. However, Tolbert demonstrates that McFague does not avoid indirectly interpreting a parable – The Wedding Feast. Her second point concerning claims of exaggerated power, McFague speaks of the enormous power of the parable. Tolbert's critique is presented in terms of the confusion between the speaker and the spoken[510], in this case it is Jesus and what and how he spoke. Tolbert suggested that because it was Jesus who spoke, what he spoke and the way he spoke "could add power,

---

[507] *Metaphor and parable* 16

[508] "A stipulative proposition is a definition, a fact, or a convention [...] which do not require justification or proof, but simply agreement among investigators that the proposition is valid for the task." Brock 2001 86

[509] Tolbert, Mary Ann, 1979, *Perspectives on the parables: an approach to multiple interpretations.* Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 141p. 41-42

[510] *Perspectives on the parables* 42

dynamic emotion, and excitement to the teasing, puzzling quality of the parable stories". However, as Tolbert continues: "That these stories *qua* stories have the inevitable ability to force hearers to lose control of themselves, is rather unbelievable."[511]; that is, that the hearer not be able to understand/interpret the parable to some degree upon hearing the story. Her point then is that because Jesus spoke them (the speaker), the parables (the spoken) would have taken on far greater power than if anyone else had spoken them.

### 5.2.2 Theological methodology

In science, methodology directly determines the kind of answers that will result from an investigation. This is no less true in any sort of inquiry but is perhaps not as explicit in theological inquiries. It is not always clearly stated what data is used, what questions are posed; in short the method as such is not usually acknowledged. I suggest that this problem is at the root of the article by Bromell concerning McFague's work.[512] He proposes that the task of theology is to articulate constructively the witness of the Christian faith: that this progression is a dialectical process based on an abstraction. Bromell has a very clear idea of what theology is about and is somewhat piqued by McFague's methodology as he wrote:

> The movement is thus a dialectical progression of abstraction from the particular/concrete/metaphorical language of doxology, to critical reflection in the general/abstract/metaphysical language of theology, to constructive articulation of Christian truth in a particular/concrete/metaphorical language of renewed worship and witness relevant to our place and our time.[513]

However, he declared that McFague did not succeed in this conversation because she left behind so many implicit questions unanalysed.

> It is the question-begging nature of the implicit assumptions, however, which create the substantial difficulties in this early work, together with a lack of precision and coherence in the argument. Implicitly, it is assumed [by McFague] throughout that God exists or has objective reality. It is further assumed, however, on the one hand, that God's being, and reality in general,

---

[511] *Perspectives on the parables* 42
[512] Bromell, David J., 1993, *Sallie McFague's "Metaphorical Theology"*. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 61, No. 3, p 485 -503
[513] *Sallie McFague's "Metaphorical Theology"* 502

> is mysterious and unknowable in principle by either infallible revelation or by reason (McFague, 1975:7, 17, 23, 141), and yet, on the other hand, that "the gospel" (otherwise tagged, neo-orthodox style, "the word of God"), is an established datum which requires only to be translated, or embodied, into contemporary language and life (McFague, 1975:1, 7, 88). It is assumed, without argument, that the career of Jesus as the Christ plays a central role, as metaphor, in Christian faith, and that his use of parabolic discourse alone would warrant, even necessitate, our own use of metaphor and parable (McFague 1975, 38, 180).[514]

This statement resonates somewhat with the critique by Kjärgaard (1986) to the extent that McFague was not particularly preoccupied with the deeper origins/premises of her ideas to thus secure their foundations, and that she did not push her ideas to their limits. This has the result that one cannot come full circle with them and bring them home, linking them unequivocally to tradition. However, Bromell has perhaps been too quick in his criticism. As McFague states all along in her writing, her process has been to deconstruct existing discourses particularly with regards to their integrity. She then proceeds in the development of her theology to "remytholigise" the story.[515] Thus as McFague has described it, it is not a systematic theology but an "intermediary" one.

However, Bromell went still further in his critique when he wrote:

> What [McFague] leaves unaddressed is [sic] the precise relations that are to obtain between (a) the primary language of metaphor and parable, (b) intermediary or parabolic theology, and (c) systematic reflection. Neither is the proper function of systematic theology anywhere defined beyond her insistence that systematic reflections take nourishment from the primary language of Christian discourse (McFague 1975:38-39, 63; 1974: 635). McFague's argument is thus, at best, incomplete.[516]

Her reflections are indeed incomplete and his statement is perhaps more a reflection of Bromell's methodology as a systematic theologian, rather than an insight into McFague's contributions. Thus he is perhaps only saying the obvious.

---

[514] *Sallie McFague's "Metaphorical Theology"*. 486 references included in original article.
[515] *Models of God* 182
[516] *Sallie McFague's "Metaphorical Theology"* 488 references included in original article.

### 5.2.3 McFague and tradition

The correlation-coupling-congruence of a theology with tradition is a recurrent problem, and to the extent possible, it needs to be addressed. Paul D. Molnar published an extended analysis of the question of the coupling of Incarnation and Resurrection in the work of a number of theologians including Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Thomas F. Torrance, John Macquarrie, Gordon Kaufman, Sallie McFague, Roger Haight, John Hick, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.[517] He confronts the dogmas relating to these two subjects as well as their ethical bases in a hypothesis to the effect that theologians who do not retain the direct link between Incarnation and Resurrection will inevitably compromise one or the other of them and as a consequence will seek salvation in ethical acts.[518] He argues that:

> There are ethical implications to any compromise of these doctrines because where the person and work of Jesus Christ are undermined by historicist, existentialist or mythological thinking, it is then thought that salvation becomes a work that we must perform in some fashion in order to save society in one way or other.[519]

However, Molnar ends up being severe with most of these theologians to such a point that George Hunsinger[520] could not resist describing Molnar as the *Fidei Defensor* in a short review of his book. His analysis is nevertheless important because it brings out answers concerning the convergence of McFague's theology and orthodoxy.

As Molnar states from the beginning of his analysis of McFague:

> McFague does not intend to maintain the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Nicene and Chacedonian sense precisely because [she] uses his "story" and "ministry" to advance [her] particular vision of how theology should function today.[521]

---

[517] Molnar, Paul D., 2007, *Incarnation and resurrection: toward a contemporary understanding.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 418p.

[518] Long, D. Stephen, 2008, *Incarnation and resurrection: toward a contemporary understanding*, Theological Studies, Vol. 69, Issue 4, p 929-931.

[519] Molnar, Paul D., 2007, *Incarnation and resurrection: toward a contemporary understanding.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 418p. xi

[520] Hunsinger 2007 http://www.eerdmans.com/shop/product.asp?p_key=9780802809988&i=2 accessed 2009.10

[521] *Incarnation and resurrection* 191

> McFague rejects the traditional understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation and regards the doctrine as a myth that needs to be remythologized by perceiving that the world is God's body and that God now can be killed in this body [creation] as he was once killed in the human form in the man Jesus.[522]
>
> Her criteria are that she wishes to use those personal experiences that mean the most to her as her norm for speaking about God and God's relation with us. [Thus] she prefers to describe God as mother, lover and friend.[523]

Sadly Molnar has not read McFague carefully enough. McFague addressing this very question writes: "How does a metaphorical theology understand its Christian 'norm': in other words, what does it say about the authority of Scripture, tradition and experience?"[524] However, it is this very question that includes the different sets of criteria that McFague uses beginning with Scripture, tradition, and experience at the last. This is her constant stance with respect to tradition; it did not however prevent her from being critical of the absolutisation of certain formulations.

We see the fundamental critique in Molnar's analysis in the following: "the one thing missing from this account [by McFague of the resurrection] is the fact that Jesus himself actually rose from the dead and encountered the disciples enabling their faith and ours."[525] This means, it would seem, that Molnar believes in a physical resurrection while McFague believes in a "mythical" resurrection, perhaps in apparitions. As he wrote: "But in reality the NT testifies to the fact that God has acted in the actual life of the historical Jesus precisely by raising him from the dead."[526] This suggests that McFague and Molnar are on two trajectories that do not cross.

Molnar's analysis can be seen as an introduction to the question of McFague's link with tradition. A number of times she declares in her essays that she believes particular ideas and metaphors to be founded or consistent with Scripture, where she usually begins, and

---

[522] *Incarnation and resurrection* 191-192
[523] *Incarnation and resurrection* 192
[524] *Models of God* 41
[525] *Incarnation and resurrection* 192
[526] *Incarnation and resurrection* 196

with tradition. There are several writers who feature regularly in her references including Aquinas, Augustine, and Irenaeus as well as other Fathers of the Church. They are quoted faithfully and the selected passages are highly appropriate particularly with respect to her thesis of the embodiment of God, transcendence and radical immanence. However, it is difficult to know at this point if these passages reflect the fullness of the authors' understanding or not.

### 5.2.4 Perception of McFague as a feminist theologian

McFague's work has been taken up by a good number of theologians particularly beginning in the 1990's and virtually all consider her to be a feminist theologian. This tends to become a pigeonhole and it is one way to marginalize a particular theology. My problem is however, that fitting any theology into a "mould", any mould, inevitably erodes or constrains the genius of the theology. One of the most complete examples of this, with respect to McFague, is by Shannon Schrein[527] whose book has the engaging title of *Quilting and Braiding* that deals with the christologies of McFague and Elizabeth Johnson. It is engaging because each has used one of these words as an image of their theology. McFague considers her contribution just one piece of a quilt and no more. Johnson has attempted "to braid a footbridge between ledges of classical and feminist Christian wisdom".[528] In her analysis, she describes the theology of each with regard to their particular concern for the role of Christ, which she points out needlessly, is central to Christianity.

Schrein provides a succinct summary of McFague's theological development, and is largely accurate. Her comments and observations are perplexing however. For example, she describes McFague's "christology as "low" or from below, for the emphasis is clearly upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth as a vehicle for the divine."[529] My question would

---

[527] Schrein, Shannon, O.S.F., 1998, *Quilting and braiding: the feminist christologies of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson in Conversation.* Liturgical Press, 122p.

[528] Johnson, Elizabeth A., 2002, *She who is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse.* Crossroad Publishing Company, 376p. 12

[529] *Quilting and braiding* 36

be, what is untraditional or feminist about this? Surely our experience of Jesus the Christ has to begin with our experience of Jesus the man: it was only because he was truly man that we talk about the Incarnation. And we only learn of Jesus, whom we are to follow, through the experience of other women and men. More importantly in the same paragraph, Schrein declares "To deny Jesus' identity with God is to send an invitation of participation to those who have been excluded by the particularity of Jesus: [...]"[530] McFague never denies this identity, thus to impugn it, is clever for argument's sake but incorrect so far as I know. The following I think is an accurate summary of McFague's thinking in this regard:

> It might appear that the pluralism which characterizes much of contemporary theological reflection is an acknowledgement of despair over being able to say what Christianity is and is not. On the contrary they [co-authors in the volume] see *the present situation, in which Christianity is not to be identified with an absolute deposit of sacred writings or with an infallible tradition of interpretation or with one particular set of models for divine-human relationship, is freeing the essential core of Christianity to live once again in people's lives. This essential core is not any book or doctrine or interpretation, but the transformative event of new life, a new way of being in the world that is grounded in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.* Scripture is testimony to this event; doctrines are interpretations of it; but as event it stands behind, beneath, and before all our constructions of it. It cannot be captured by any of our interpretations.[531]

This includes the whole paragraph written by McFague in the original publication: in *italic* is the section quoted by Schrein.[532] Schrein's point is that this statement by McFague "affirms the Christian way as a true way, but not the only way." This is essentially correct; nevertheless, I think it illustrates what it is that we effect as we attempt to synthesize or, I suggest in this case, mould ideas to our own "eye". From this author's eye, McFague's statement makes sense. I think she is saying that God cannot be described nor be limited to words. And surely her idea is universal in Christianity and is simply not limited to feminist thought.

---

[530] *Quilting and braiding* 37

[531] McFague, Sallie, 1982b, *An epilogue: Christian paradigm.p.*323-336, in Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds., Christian theology: an introduction to its traditions and tasks, Philidelphia, Fortress, 400p. 324

[532] *Quilting and braiding* 37

Indeed it is amusing to read Naomi Goldenberg whose feminist "eye" noted that:

> McFague-TeSelle wants to build a theology that will close the gap between mind and body. She suggests the concept of metaphor as a vehicle for this. Metaphorical thinking, she says, opposes the "Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body, objective and subjective». All of TeSelle's metaphors come from Jesus' parables. She believes that "the parables accept the complexity and ambiguity of life as lived here in this world. [533]

Implicit in these remarks by Goldenberg is that McFague (TeSelle) is a feminist. But as she goes on it becomes clear that McFague does not meet the criteria (unstated) that Goldenberg has in mind. Therefore one can conclude that McFague is not a feminist, or else is a very poor one. And as Goldenberg continues:

> Although TeSelle's work deserves applause for showing how metaphors are intimately connected to daily living, her theory can have only limited application as long as it remains wholly within the Christian framework. The concept of metaphor as a religious phenomenon can have a much wider range than TeSelle has yet permitted it. Feminist analysis requires this because a feminist theology must cease depending on the metaphor of Jesus himself.[534]

This has to be a compliment with the nastiest hook-at-the-end I've ever encountered in secondary literature. It leaves McFague damned if she does and damned if she doesn't pursue her metaphorical theology. I have learned, as it happens, that she is continuing.[535]

## 5.3 TO CONCLUDE THIS DISCUSSION

The main reason for undertaking this thesis was to investigate my intuition that creation, living in this world, had to be important. After all, creation is the only thing that God has ever done. Furthermore, God said that it was good. This is "God good" not just "'everyday good". So creation had to be, perhaps, infinitely important.

---

[533] Goldenberg, Naomi R., 1979, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions.* Boston, Beacon Press, 153p. 24

[534] *Changing of the Gods* 25

[535] Personal communication 2011.06.17

I believe that simply being is a sacrament; by being, creation realizes God's intent for God's creation, which is to express God's love. The alternative is intolerable, to use McFague's word: that we are mere accidents as some philosophers would have us. No, if I am in the *Imago Dei*, so is the rest of creation, every grain of it.

The interesting thing is that McFague came to this conclusion in 1987, 15 years before I did. But what a delight to learn this from her. And in the process I discover that she and I are not alone. Schillebeeckx and Rahner among others have said, perhaps more circumspectly, what she and I know. To be scooped in this way is marvellous.

Unfortunately, McFague's theology does not appear to have been infused by the *aggiornamiento* of Vatican II Council. At several points I wanted to interject, "But that is not how we think any longer." This is very noticeable when her writing is compared to that of Elizabeth Johnson who has clearly outstripped a 1950's 'traditionalist' perspective. But it must be remembered that McFague is addressing a clearly defined audience; white, middle-class, Protestant North Americans, who for the most part have yet to open the windows. And we, like them, have yet to face very serious responsibilities.

In that respect, there is one set of premises of McFague's that I disagree with. Simply put, I am not responsible for what is presently going on with our climate. The basic problem is that nobody knows what is going on. Therefore, the cause of the changes which appear to be being measured, is truly unknown. The point is that, firstly, a correlation which appeared to exist until ten years ago is not a demonstration of causality. Secondly, the correlation model cannot be inverted in order to predict what might or might not happen in the future. Indeed during the past ten years there has been no correlation, a fact that has not been published. Thirdly, there is no model at this time capable of explaining what is happening.[536] Our climate and its interaction with the Earth's surface, is only another example, along with the biological world, of the marvellous complexity of creation. All this would be beside the point if McFague did not see the IPCC 4th Assessment Report as

[536] The mechanisms are not as relatively simple as the local depletion of the Ozone Layer.

a means of preventing Governments from "squeezing around the solid scientific consensus".[537] They would be forced to face reality.

However and despite this critique, where does this leave us? We and our natural world are not sustainable in the manner in which we humans now live. Hence her theology has plunged into the centre of our reality, of our world veiw. We are not only living an ethical crises (time of decision) by diminishing our own environment, we are also promoting this way of living globally.

This is not as dramatic an argument as that used by McFague, but it is perhaps closer to the real. This in no way detracts from her theology and its implied praxis, cruciform living, but it does make it harder to argue.

[537] Personal communication November 2009

# CHAPTER 6

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following points are responses to the questions raised at the start of this thesis with regard to the major ideas in McFague's theology. The questions included:

- What is Sallie McFague's theology?
- What is her methodology?
- Where is McFague's theology leading, that is to say what might be its inherent trajectory?
- Where is she taking us with respect to "orthodoxy"? Is her theology linked to tradition? And if not, can it be liked to tradition?

The conclusions are drawn from the preceding chapters and presented without further discussion.

1. It was hypothesised that McFague developed a metaphoric theology which, it is concluded, she has done.
2. Her method consists of the analysis of existing dominant metaphors with respect to the relationship between God, humans and the rest of creation. She also employs a socio-anthropological analysis of our relationship to our living and inanimate world.
3. She concludes that the dominant metaphors, coupled with the neo-classical economic model are fundamental to our way of living. We have adopted a lifestyle which uses more of nature than nature can provide, with an economic system based on our self-interest. This constitutes her understanding of sin; we sin against ourselves and the rest of our world and, in this way, against God.
4. The thrust of her theology is to propose metaphors of God to which more of us can relate; mother, lover, and friend. This is in order to re-establish the

relationships with our community which our self-interests have diminished if not entirely smothered.

5. The pigeonholing of McFague as an eco-feminist is both unfortunate and inaccurate. She is a theologian who has produced a metaphorical or intermediary theology which she eventually places in the context of our relation to creation. Her contribution is to re-image our natural relationship to this world - the human community, and in particular the natural world. She stresses embodiment in contrast to abstractions, going to the extent of proposing that creation is God's body. This has the stupendous implication that God, traditionally transcendent, is now radically immanent in the sacrament of God's creation.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

One of the questions raised initially was to discover the trajectory McFague was following. This has been traced in chapters 3 and 4. There are two avenues that might be pursued in the future.

- McFague's theology has been richly developed. It would be timely and appropriate to develop an explicit spirituality which would complement her thinking. It would begin to provide an answer as to how we are to live in the light of her theology. She has been clear concerning the negative results of our present way of living. She has hinted at such spirituality when she raised the ideas of cruciform living and kenosis. This has to be developed further.

- A second task will be to trace the links of the model of her theology to traditional theological models. Threads to the past are vital. Her theology can be understood as a response to the failure of traditional theology to deal adequately with the disruption or interruption that is postmodernism, a logical consequence of how we have been living and thinking for four centuries. Two approaches, or perhaps more correctly theologies, might be considered: those developed by Edward

Schillebeeckx and Paul Tillich based on correlation of "modern questions" and "traditional answers", and that by Lieven Boeve which addresses interruptions that are represented by the "modern questions", and that may require a new set of answers.

# CHAPTER 7

# CHAPTER 7: BIBLIOGRAPHY

## 7.1 PRIMARY


McFague, Sallie, 1975, *Speaking in parables: a study in metaphor and theology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 186p.

McFague, Sallie, 1975b, *An 'intermediary theology': in service of the hearing of God's word*, The Christian Century, pp. 625-629.

McFague, Sallie, 1982, *Metaphorical theology: models of God in religious language.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 225p.

McFague, Sallie, 1982b, *An epilogue: Christian paradigm.p.*323-336, in Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds., Christian theology: an introduction to its traditions and tasks, Philidelphia, Fortress, 400p.

McFague, Sallie, 1987, *Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 224p.

McFague, Sallie, 1991, *An earthly theological agenda, Christian Century*, Vol. 108, p12-16.

McFague, Sallie, 1993, *The body of God: an ecological theology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 288p.

McFague, Sallie, 1997, *Super, natural Christians: how we should love nature.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 224p.

McFague, Sally, 2000. *An ecological christology: does christianity have it?*, p29-45 in Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Reuther (eds.), Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 720p.

McFague, Sallie, 2001, *Life abundant: rethinking theology and economy for a planet in peril (searching for a new framework).* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 274p.

McFague, Sallie, 2008, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 204p.

TeSelle, Sallie M., 1966, *Literature and the christian life.* Yale University Press, 238p.

TeSelle, S. (ed.), 1971, *The family, communes and utopian societies.* New York, Harper and Row, 137p.


## 7.2 SECONDARY


Baum, Gregory, 2010, *The church's tomorrow*, The Ecumenist, V. 47 p 6-10

Bock, Peter and Scheibe, Bettina, 2001, *Getting it right: r & d methods for science and engineering.* Academic Press, San Diego, 406p.

Boeve, Lieven, 2003, *Interrupting tradition: an essay on christian faith in a postmodern context.* Peeters, Leuven, 183p.

Boeve, Lieven, 2007, *God interrupts history: theology in a time of upheaval.* Continuum Publishing Company, 212p.

Bouma, Rolf, 1997, *Feminist Theology: Rosemary Radford Ruether/Sallie McFague.* The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology. http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/mwt_themes_907_ruethermcfague.htm#Feminist%20Theology:%20Rosemary%20Radford%20Ruether/Sallie%20McFague.

Bromell, David J., 1993, *Sallie McFague's "Metaphorical Theology".* Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 61, No. 3, p 485 -503

Buber, M., 1970, *I and Thou.* W. Kauffman, trans., New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

Cobb, John, 1981, *Feminism and Process thought: a two-way relationship.* in Feminism and process thought. ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney, New York, Edwin Mellen Press.

Cresswell, John W., 1998, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions.* SAGE Publications, 403p.

Crossan, John Dominic, 1973, *On Parables: the challenge of the historical Jesus.* New York: Harper and Row. 128p.

Day, Dorthy, 1952, *The long loneliness: the autobiography of Dorothy Day.* New York, Harper and Row, 288p.

Dodd, C.H., 1961, *The parables of the Kingdom.* William Collins and Sons, Glasgow,160p.

Fergusson, David, 1998, *The Cosmos and the Creator.* London: SPCK, 8

Frascati-Lochhead, Marta, 1998, *Kenosis and feminist theology: the challenge of Gianni Vattimo.* State University of New York Press, 254p.

Friedman, Milton, 1953, *Essays in Positive Economics.* University of Chicago Press, 334p.

Funk, Robert Walter, 1966, *Language, hermeneutic, and word of God : the problem of language in the New Testament and contemporary theology.* Harper & Row, 317*p.*

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 1977, *Philosophical hermeneutics.* trans. and ed. David E. Linge, University of California Press, 243p.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 2004, *Truth and method.* Sheed and Ward, Continuum Publishing Group, 601p.

Gilkey, Langdon, 1985, *God in Christian theology: an introduction to its traditions and tasks.* rev. ed., Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King eds., Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 400p.

Goldenberg, Naomi R., 1979, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions.* Boston, Beacon Press, 153p.

Griffiths, Bedde, 1954, *The Golden String: an autobiography.* Templegate Publishers, 189p.

Gurdjieff, G.I., 1985, *Meetings with remarkable men.* New York, Penguin Books,

Hamerton-Kelly, Robert, 1979, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus.* Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 128p.

Hampson, Daphne , 1990, *Theology and Feminism.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 159p.

Hart, Trevor, 1989, *Regarding Karl Barth: essays toward a reading of his theology.* Carlisle: Paternoster, 181p.

Herschel, Abraham J., 1959, *Between God and man: an interpretation of Judaism.* Simon & Schuster, 298p.

Hunsinger, George, 2007, comment on Molnar 2007 http://www.eerdmans.com/shop/product.asp?p_key=9780802809988&i=2 accessed October 2009.

IPCC-Intergovernamental Panel on Climate Change, 2007, Fourth Assessment Report, Pachauri, R.K. and Reisinger, A. (Eds.), Geneva, Switzerland. 104p.

Johnson, Elizabeth A., 2002, *She who is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse.* Crossroad Publishing Company, 376p.

Johnson, Elizabeth A., 2008, *Quest for the living God: mapping frontiers in the theology of God.* New York, Continuum, 234p.

King, U., 1992, *Spirituality, society and culture.* The Way Supplement, 73, p14-23.

King, U., 1995, *The complex tapestry of spirituality.* Resource, 17:3, p9-11.

King, U. Kino, U., 1998, *Spirituality in a postmodern age: faith and praxis in new contexts.* ed., in Faith and Praxis in a Post-modern Age. London Cassell, 200p.

Kjärgaard, Mogens Stiller, 1986, *Metaphor and parable: a systematic analysis of the specific structure and cognitive function of the synoptic similes and parables qua metaphors.* Acta Theologica Danica, v.20, Leiden: Brill, 264p.

Ladd, George Eldon, 1963, *The life-setting of the parables of the kingdom.* Journal of Bible and Religion, Vol. 31, p 193-199

Lewis, C.S., 1960, *The four loves.* New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 156p.

Lewis, R.W.B., 1959, *Review: Hold on hard to the huckleberry bushes.* The Sewanee Review, v. 67, 3, *p.*462-477.

Livingston, James C., Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Sarah Coakley, and James L. Jr., , 2006, *Modern christian thought: the twentieth century.* Fortress Press, 545p.

Long, D. Stephen, 2008, *Incarnation and resurrection: toward a contemporary understanding,* Theological Studies, Vol. 69, Issue 4, p 929-931.

McDaniel, Jay B., 1990, *Revisioning God and the self: lessons from buddhism, in liberating life.* Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology, Ed. C. Birch et al., Orbis Books, N.Y., p228-258

Miller, David L., 2010 *Theopoetry or theopoetics?,* Cross Currents, p 6-23.

Molnar, Paul D., 2007, *Incarnation and resurrection: toward a contemporary understanding.* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 418p.

Morwood, Michael, 2002, *Tomorrow's Catholics: understanding God and Jesus in a new millennium.* Twenty-third Publications, 146p.

Needleman, Jacob, 1984, *The new religions,* Crossroad, 243p.

Needleman, Jacob, 2009, *What is God?* Jermeyp. Tarcher/Penguin, 241p.

Nietzsche, Frederick, 1883, *Also sprach Zarathustra / Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York, Viking Press, 1966.

Pagola, José A., 2009, *Jesus: an historical aproximation.* Convivium Press, 560p.

Ratzinger, Joseph, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, *Jesus of Nazareth - Part 1.* New York, Doubleday, 374p.

Ricœur, Paul, 1960, Finitude et culpabilité: Tome II. La symbolique du mal. Paris, Aubier, 335p.

Ricœur, Paul, 1969, *The symbolism of evil.* Beacon Press, 362p.

Ricœur 1973, *Creativity in Language: word, polysemy, metaphor.* Philosophy Today, v.17:2,*p.*97-111.

Ricœur, Paul, 1974, *Philosophy and religious language.* The Journal of Religion, v.54:1,*p.*71-85.
Schillebeeckx, Edward, 1980, *Christ, the experience of Jesus as Lord.* Seabury Press, 925p.
Schillebeeckx, Edward, 1981, *Jesus, an experiment in Christology.* Crossroad, 767p.
Schillebeeckx, Edward, 1981, *Interim report on the books Jesus & Christ.* Crossroad, 151p.
Schillebeeckx, Edward, 1993, *God is new each moment.* T.&T. Clark,128p.
Schrein, Shannon, O.S.F., 1998, *Quilting and braiding: the feminist christologies of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson in Conversation.* Liturgical Press, 122p.
Schüsler Fiorenza, Elizaeth, 1992, *Feminist spritituality, christian identity, and catholic vision.p.*136-148 in Womanspirit rising: A feminist reader in religion., eds. Carol*p.* Christ and Judith Plaskow, Harper Collins Publishers, 298p.
Sewell, Elizabeth, 1964, *The human metaphor.* South Bend ID, University of Notre Dame Press, 212p.
Temple, William, 1935, *Nature, man and God.* being The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in the Academical Years 1932-1933 and 1933-1934, London, Macmillan and Co., Limited.
Tillich, Paul, 1954, *Love, power, and justice: ontological analyses and ethical applications.* New York, Oxford University Press,
Tolbert, Mary Ann, 1979, *Perspectives on the parables: an approach to multiple interpretations.* Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 141p.
Trible, Phyllis, 1978, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality.* Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 206p.
Vanin, Christina, 2001 *The significance of the incarnation for ecological theology.* EcoTheology, v.10, p108-122.
Via, D.O., 1967, *The Parables: their literary and existential dimensions.* Wipf & Stock Publishers, 228p.
Vattimo, Gianni, 1989, *The transparent society.* Wiley, 129p.
Viviano, Benedict T., 1982, *Schillebeeckx's Jesus and Christ - contributions to christian life.* Spirituality Today, v. 34, No. 2, p 129-143.
Wilder, Amos Niven, 1971, *The early christian rhetoric: the language of the gospel.* Harvard University Press, 167p.
Wilder, Amos Niven, 1976, *Theopoetic: theology and the religious imagination.* Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 106p.
Woolman, John, 1961, *The journal of John Woolman and a plea for the poor.* New York, Corinth, 249p.